

THE
AMBITION
OF
JUDITH

Hia

530

FILE COPY

THE
AMBITION OF JUDITH



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

<https://archive.org/details/ambitionofjudith00birr>

THE
AMBITION OF JUDITH

BY

OLIVE BIRRELL

AUTHOR OF

'ANTHONY LANGSYDE', 'BEHIND THE MAGIC MIRROR'

ETC.

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1898

THE
AMBITION OF JUDITH

CHAPTER I

JUDITH's home was in the ugly street of an ugly town in the north of England. Until she reached the age of twenty-one ugliness was her constant portion. She drank it in, as more favoured children drink in beauty, and the misfortune was that, little by little, that craving after loveliness which most human beings are born with died a natural death in her heart.

On the door-plate of her father's house the name 'Adolf Hermann' was engraved, and, immediately below, these words, 'Professor of the Pianoforte and Violin.' Hermann was only a *nom de guerre*, adopted when its owner came out at London concerts, lest his real name, Isaac Benjamin, should prejudice a British public. He was a forlorn-looking man when his youngest daughter first consciously made his acquaintance, but in early life some fascination must

have belonged to him, or he could never have persuaded pretty Flora Maxwell to run away from her comfortable home and become his bride. They had four children—Victor, who went out to the Cape, where he prospered in a small way, and married a Scotchwoman; Bertha, who followed her mother's example by marrying early and choosing a very poor man for her husband; Ludovic; and Judith.

These two came like afterthoughts when the others were already schoolboy and schoolgirl. They received a meagre education, because such prosperity as poor Hermann ever had was at an end before their eyes saw the light in Cambridge Street, Rivington. Mrs. Hermann had struggled hard to bring Bertha up ‘like a lady,’ which made the disappointment of her marriage more severe. Perhaps this was the reason why she never tried to train or educate Judith. Her spirit was crushed and her heart broken. ‘We must bring our minds to our circumstances,’ she sometimes said; ‘no use in teaching girls ideas above their stations.’

The only time Judith saw her mother cry was when Victor sailed for the Cape. He had always been her darling. Even the sound of his footsteps reminded her of those happy days when Hope fluttered in the air, just over her head, and his father and she

were still lovers. The babies of later years seemed like step-children in comparison. Yet Ludovic was a handsome boy, and a very good-natured one.

The acquaintances of the family never considered Judith handsome. She had dusky red hair, which shone like molten gold in the sunshine, and red hair was not the fashion in Rivington. They sometimes said that if it were not for her eyes Judy Hermann would be positively ugly. Judy, they called her, marvelling, no doubt, that her parents should have chosen such an objectionable name. The little girl's eyes deserved the praise they received, being large and well set, and of a beautiful hazel colour. Her temper was not her strong point. It could scarcely have been described as a Christian temper, though it was the means of giving her a lifelong friend.

She happened to be staring out of the window (Judy was much too fond of doing this), and spied a herd of boys on their way home from school.

'There's Lulu, talking to that Slater boy,' she said. 'I wish he wouldn't. I hate all the Slaters.'

'Do come away from the window,' objected Bertha. 'It is unladylike to be seen there.'

'I am not a lady,' replied Judy, promptly. 'Oh ! see that little pig of a Slater. He is actually fighting with another boy, a very little one. It is Aubrey

Crewe, the drawing-master's son. He has knocked him down, and now he has pulled him up again and set him with his back against the wall. Why doesn't Lulu do something? They are all standing round, looking on. See! Aubrey's face is covered with mud, and he is as white as a sheet. I declare I will go myself!'

The front door was open and Judy halfway down the street before her sister knew what had happened.

'Oh, you coward!' she cried, as she approached the scene of action. 'Slater, you horrid, disgusting boy!'

'Miss Judy,' expostulated Slater, 'this is not a time for you to interfere. I am giving him a lesson.'

'And I mean to give you a lesson,' cried Judy, springing on her foe, and taking him so completely unawares that he actually fell prostrate, and lay in the mud as Aubrey had done a minute before.

'How do you like that?' she cried exulting. 'I heard what you were trying to make Crewe say. Now say it yourself—“*I am an ass.*”'

Slater tried to leap up, but she put her little white hand inside his collar and choked him, so that he fell backwards once more. 'Help me, you fellows,' he gasped, but no one stirred; that moral cowardice, which characterises the male species, keeping them

inactive now, as it had done in Aubrey's case a few seconds before.

'Say "*I am an ass,*"' commanded Judy, 'or I will hold you till one of the masters comes by.'

Slater did not wish to die by suffocation in the grasp of a girl. He actually choked out the declaration she wished for, and then staggered to his feet, looking rather sick.

'I will be even with you to-morrow, Crewe,' he said; 'and as for you, Judy Hermann, I don't hurt you because you are a girl, but I will take means——'

'Oh, don't say anything rash,' said Judy; 'and remember, if you touch Crewe again I will send the story to the newspapers. Yes, I will! I know Mr. Smith, the editor of the *Evening Planet*. He lodges in our house, and I will ask him to put it in, in large type, and give all the names, and tell every one you were knocked down by a girl, and had to say "*I am an ass*" because you fought with a boy half your size. There now!'

The crowd of boys stared aghast. This would be an awful piece of revenge on Judy's part, and yet not impossible, for Smith did lodge with the Hermanns, and they could not feel sure that the tale of the editorship was a falsehood. The affair ended in Slater walking

away alone and the rest dispersing gradually, until Ludovic, Aubrey, and Judy were left by themselves. Ludovic's sense of dignity was outraged, and for some seconds he really could not speak to his sister. Aubrey also felt ashamed. If a girl could knock Slater down, why had not he done so? Finally, Ludovic broke silence:—

‘Judy,’ he said, ‘you are more like a demon than a girl. I wonder what every one will say. You flew at Slater and knocked him down when he wasn’t looking, and then you tried to choke him. That wasn’t fair. Girls are such sneaks.’

‘I couldn’t help it,’ said Judy. ‘I am not strong enough to fight fair; and if you don’t like my way of doing things, why didn’t you do something yourself?’

Aubrey liked the sound of his champion’s voice much better when she talked to Ludovic than when she dictated terms to Slater. He liked her brown eyes too, and her red hair, hanging in a picturesque but very untidy pigtail down her back. She turned to him next.

‘And you, little new boy, remember next time not to give in easily. You should have kicked Slater when he held you, and told him he was a brute and a wretch, and anything you could think of.’

Aubrey had been leading a dog’s life since his

admission into the Rivington College, three weeks before, because his father had the misfortune to teach drawing in the same place. He was a bird of strange feather—thin, delicate, and poor. Vulgarity revolted him ; bad language made him blush. On those rare occasions when he was roused to self-defence, his only method of fighting was to strike with open hands. The boys called him a sneak because he spoke politely to the masters, and a booby because he tried to save a starved cat one of them was stoning in the street. It is astonishing how miserable a child can be at eleven years old, and how quickly his spirits rebound with the first gleam of hope. That morning, before trudging off to school, Aubrey had wished himself dead. Now, in spite of natural shame at owing his deliverance to a girl, he desired that life might be prolonged until he had seen Judy again.

CHAPTER II

THE next time the children met each other was also in the street. Judy was coming back from her dancing lesson ; Aubrey had been on an errand to the ‘Art’ shop, where lead pencils were sold, and drawing-paper and lithographed studies of rural scenes for beginners to copy.

‘Tell me how you like school now ?’ demanded Judy. ‘Ludovic says the boys will soon leave off teasing you. They tease every one at first. It is a pity you don’t know how to fight. Always double your fists when you hit any one. I don’t, but I am a girl.’

‘Oh, teasing doesn’t matter much,’ said Aubrey, ‘and they are beginning to tire of it already. But I hate the school, and I hate Rivington—this part of it, I mean ; the river’s splendid, only, of course, no one lives where they can see the river.’

‘What’s the matter with Rivington ?’

‘The streets are so ugly, and there are public-houses at all the corners.’

‘Not quite *all*,’ said Judy, trying to be impartial.

‘Look in front of you !’

Judy looked, and beheld a large gin-palace with a dirty white swan (life size) hanging over the entrance as a sign. Disagreeable women were trailing in and out; a starved cat picked up some fish-bones from the gutter; while three wretched children sat on the curb-stone, patiently waiting, their eyes fixed on the ugly swing door through which their mother had passed. It was a loathsome scene, squalor, vice, and suffering being represented in almost equal proportions; but so deadened by custom were Judy’s senses that she scarcely recognised any cause of offence.

‘You are a very strange boy. I can’t understand. All towns are ugly, but people must go on living in towns. Where did you live before coming here ?’

‘In Italy. Sometimes in towns, more often in the country.’

‘Are there no poor people in Italy ? Most of the streets near our house are poor streets where poor people live, so they must be ugly.’

‘Italy is full of poor people, but they don’t look as these do. When I heard of poverty I thought of white cottages with vines growing over them. I

never thought of black streets and filthy corners like these. Oh !'

He gave a sigh of disgust, as if his surroundings made him sick ; and Judy decided he was quite the queerest boy she had ever met.

'I wonder whether it would comfort you to see me dance,' she said reflectively. 'Madame Hortense sends her little girl to my fathier to learn music, and gives me dancing lessons in exchange. There's a whole class of us, but I dance the best. She says I am a born dancer.'

Aubrey's face expressed interest and admiration, but he was more bashful than she, and did not know how to reply.

'Come to our house this evening and you will see me dance,' continued Judy. 'I shall be practising while Ludovic learns his lessons. Bertha plays the piano for me. When we have both finished we play cards and dominoes. Have you a sister ?'

'No.'

'What a pity ! If you had she would help you to bear things. But, never mind ! Come and see us as often as you like. Ludovic will be kind to you if I ask him. There. Mind you come. Good-bye !'

Aubrey remembered this conversation years after-

wards when the world said Judy was as hard as a stone, and had no heart worth speaking of. The sudden softening of voice as she asked, ‘Have you a sister?’ stayed in his memory, associated sadly enough with her love for another person. She sympathised with his lonely state a very little, but it was Ludovic of whom she thought in putting that question. He was the source and fountain of love to her. Other children had mothers who doted upon them. Some blessed creatures asserted that both their parents could be counted on for sympathy and kindness. She had only her brother. It was related of Judy that, seeing a little girl look unhappy once in the dancing class, she went up to her and whispered, ‘Is it your *brother* you are sorry for?’

Aubrey understood then and always that Ludovic came first in her affections, leaving every other mortal a long way behind. It was a blessing to be grateful for, that she should adopt him as a kind of half-brother, and be able to feel an interest in his affairs. Before long the three children, though widely dissimilar in tastes and habits, had become close allies. Judy never read anything in those days, wise or foolish. Ludovic chiefly confined his attention to some old volumes of *Punch*, which had come to his father in lieu of a money debt. Aubrey devoured

books as a hungry giant might have devoured armies of soldiers. His imagination by degrees came to his aid, helping him to escape from the sordid vulgar streets into a world where all was beautiful. Nature never fails to provide these compensations. If the loathsome swan over the gin-palace caused him agony which harder children could not understand, neither could they understand the exquisite joy he felt on spring mornings when white fleecy clouds chased each other across the sky. On black days it was easy to leave actual facts behind, and call up visions of an enchanted land, where Judy and he shared heart-stirring adventures. In this world of fancy he always rescued Judy from her foes, but in Rivington things usually turned out the other way. Poor little red-haired Judith, who developed each year a more passionate love of pleasure and of money which buys the means of pleasure, had still some elements of nobility in her nature.

One afternoon, when childhood was already slipping from them, the two boys and she went for a long walk into the suburbs of the town, to get ideas, Aubrey said, for pictures. They were all three somewhat vexed because the eldest of Bertha's children, a boy in petticoats, named by his uncle and aunt the 'Imp,' would persist in following. When they perched on

the top of a railway bank to rest, this small treasure ran off in search of daisies, and was soon seen on the rails beneath, just where trains might be expected to pass. Judy hurried to the rescue, and Aubrey went slowly after her, his head full of a design he had just conceived for a large historical painting, ‘The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots.’

They were all standing on the track of the railway, Aubrey and Judy close together, the Imp still at some distance, when the whistle of a train was heard. ‘Run, Judy, run !’ cried Aubrey, and made straight for the bank. It seemed as if some force behind compelled him to run, as if his desire for safety were absolutely uncontrollable, like the first cry of a baby on entering the world. But the strange thing was that Judy felt no such impulse to save her life. The very moment he cried ‘Run’ she turned away from the bank, and dashed down the line to save that foolish Imp. She reached him, caught his frock, and pulled him to one side where the rails curved, leaving wider space. A second after, the London express rushed past and disappeared in the distance like a comet with a red star at the end of its tail, making the ground shake with the swiftness of transit.

Judy had a headache when they went home that

evening, but she kissed the Imp more affectionately than was her wont, and liked him better for the rest of his life. Aubrey felt crushed and bewildered.

'I couldn't help running,' he said to Judy. 'Something forced me. I think I lost my senses. I saw the engine, and I simply had to run.'

For a long time afterwards his self-esteem was wounded. He asked himself whether he should act like a coward in a shipwreck or a fire, and trample women down to save his own skin, as he had heard of others doing. Then he wondered why Judy did not feel that overmastering savage horrid desire to escape death at all costs. Of one thing he was sure, if she had felt it, she must have yielded. The explanation could only be, that she *had not* felt it. But by what law of magic was she exempt? At this point his reasoning stopped.

As regards outward circumstances the children's lives were much on a par. Aubrey's mother was a tired, forlorn, domestic drudge like Mrs. Hermann. He learnt to shiver by anticipation when a postman's knock disturbed their dark house. When he carried an envelope to his parents, he looked nervously to see if the paper which fell out contained those terrible words, 'account rendered.' If it did, he knew there would be misery and tears.

Mr. Smith, the Hermanns' lodger, was also a friend of theirs, and used to come sometimes to smoke a pipe in that empty room which went by the name of the studio. He was a big, jovial man, with a loud voice, not easily crushed by disappointment. One evening Aubrey opened the studio door and overheard a scrap of conversation. His father happened to be speaking.

'I used to think,' he said, 'that it was lack of opportunity which kept me back. I used to say that if my people had sent me to Paris to study I could have reached my goal in life. Now I know that's not true. Genius triumphs over hindrances. It is like murder; it will out. I failed because I had none; not a single spark. I have no original ideas. Do you mark me? *No ideas.* I am only fit to be a copyist, and that's as good as saying I am a fool who had better never have handled a brush.'

'Tuts,' said Smith, 'you earn your living by brushes and paints. Where's the harm in that, I should like to know? The secret of happiness is to be content with what fortune brings. We start off in the morning in search of something. We don't find it. What then? Shall we break our hearts and cry for the moon? No. Take the second best and pretend it is as good as the first. I meant to write plays,

and I edit a halfpenny newspaper instead. On the whole I think I prefer the newspaper.'

Aubrey tried to steal away unobserved, but they heard him, and Smith stretched out his huge hand.

'Come here and tell us what you mean to do with *your* life. It lies in front of you. What are your ambitions?'

'I mean to paint pictures,' whispered Aubrey, 'the very best I can. Beautiful ones! Not only landscape, but faces of men and women. I don't mind being poor. I don't care if no one ever looks at my pictures. I shall paint them just for myself. Then I shall be perfectly happy.'

Crewe gave an impatient groan.

'I can't help it, father,' said Aubrey. 'I was born like that, and, you know, it was you who taught me to draw.'

'I had better have taught you to make chairs,' said his father, angrily. 'Look at him, Smith! There's an arm for a boy of thirteen. He is like a plant trying to grow in the dark. Run downstairs, and don't talk such nonsense any more.'

Smith stayed to supper that night, and did his best to be entertaining, telling such extraordinary stories that even Mrs. Crewe was compelled to laugh.

He poured water into a wineglass which had held claret, and gave it to Aubrey to carouse with.

'Drink to your own health, my boy,' he said, 'and never let despair seize hold of you. "Lose heart, lose all," that's my motto. No one knows what good luck to-morrow may bring. Have you emptied your glass? Now shut your eyes and wish.'

'I have wished,' cried Aubrey, in a twinkling.

'*Already?* Well, I undertake to guess your wish. A box of paints!'

'How could you possibly know?'

'I made a shot at a venture, and now I will make another. To-morrow, you will get what you want.'

'Don't raise his hopes too high,' said the anxious mother. 'Aubrey, dear, Mr. Smith is only joking. Wishes never come true in that easy way.'

But this one did, for the next day Aubrey received a perfectly new box of water-colours, four or five brushes, and some reams of drawing-paper.

CHAPTER III

YEARS passed, which brought changes into the children's lives; most of them melancholy changes. Judy grew tall, but remained the best dancer at Madame Hortense's Christmas parties. The Rivington clerks and small tradesmen, among whom her lot was cast, were forced to recognise that she had something uncommon about her. 'How queer that such a plain red-haired girl should turn out pretty!' they said. As she walked along the streets, her small head poised gracefully on her slender white throat, men used to turn aside to give a second glance, and strangers asked who she was. 'Is her hair bright or dark?' they wanted to know, but the answer was never forthcoming. Sometimes it was a dusky colour, often it looked like a shower of gold. Her short upper lip, and nose just a little turned up, gave piquancy to her appearance, her feet and hands really compelled admiration.

Ludovic was still her only love, though Aubrey

and she remained good friends. His parents died within six months of each other, and the poor boy had to go to a merchant's office to earn his living (a very meagre one), while his evenings and few holiday afternoons were spent in the School of Art. This sort of life might have gone on till he was grey-haired, had not the *Evening Planet* come to the rescue. That paper prospered so well as to astonish everybody. Mr. Smith became very rich, fat, and important; his broad face used to glisten with satisfaction when he talked of his paper and the sacrifices he had made on its behalf. A confirmed bachelor, he liked to harangue parents on their duties to their children, quoting Ibsen sometimes, but much more frequently himself. 'As I said, last week,' he would begin, and people felt compelled to listen, because the speaker was so big, and had such supreme self-confidence. Mr. Smith was not a man to take snubs.

One day he announced his intention of sending Aubrey to Paris as an art student. It then appeared that an old friend of his, Paul Rochefort, was now a person of some consequence in the art world, and had written giving full instructions and advice as to the best way of educating his *protégé*.

'I can't do anything big myself,' said Smith, 'so the next best thing is to discover some one who can,

and give him a chance. That's always my principle in life. Take the next best. And now, young Sir, are you willing to go? If you grind on here, you are sure of a living, a precious small one, but still a living. I can't guarantee that you won't starve after your education is finished. I will see you get plenty of frogs and radishes till then.'

Aubrey's eyes flashed.

'I will go,' he cried; 'I am immensely obliged to you, and I sha'n't starve while I have hands and eyes. There's always drudgery to be had, even if original work fails.'

'That's right!' cried Smith. 'That's the right spirit! Try for the best, and if it slips through your fingers take the second best, only don't let the world see you crying.'

So Aubrey disappeared, and the house in Cambridge Street missed him a good deal. The winter which completed Judith's twenty-first year, the same which saw his Paris life begin, was melancholy in more ways than one. Bertha's husband failed disastrously in business, and, after much family discussion, it was decided he should join Victor at the Cape, leaving his wife and children to board with her parents during his absence.

'What lives we shall have!' said Judith to

Ludovic, one afternoon in January, when the change had just been accomplished. ‘I don’t mind the Imp, but Georgie squalls all day, and Beatrice is a little spoilt vixen. I do hate children !’

‘It is rather sickening,’ said poor Ludovic, who was now twenty-three, a clerk, like Aubrey, but without a passion for art to make some hours in each day beautiful. He was beginning to despair of the future, and would have gone abroad long ago, had not the parting with his sister barred the way.

‘There’s one plan by which we might escape,’ said Judith. ‘If Bertha stays and keeps house, why shouldn’t you and I go away ? Madame Hortense spoke to me about it again. Her brother-in-law can find me work in London. Doesn’t it seem a pity to lose a second chance ?’

Ludovic made no reply. Three years before, the question of a stage life for Judith had been raised, and her father, rousing himself to unaccustomed action, had set his face against it.

‘I am twenty-one,’ said Judith. ‘Late, but not too late in my case. I have been in training ever since I was six years old. This time I am determined to choose my own destiny. . . .’

Rash words ! A double knock crashing against the front door drowned their conclusion.

‘Who is this?’ exclaimed both brother and sister. ‘A carriage and footman.’

Judith hid behind one of the curtains and peeped.

‘An old lady,’ she said. ‘Such a queer one—her face might have been cut out of wax, it is so yellow and sharp. She looks like a witch and an empress both in one. Her sables are worth praying for. Who can she be?’

‘I wish she had not come just now,’ said Ludovic.

He was highly impressionable, and this unexpected visit at the very moment when his sister spoke so confidently of choosing her own destiny gave his nerves a shock. It almost seemed as if the Higher Power which controls human affairs had been offended and had suddenly intervened. Judy, always practical, concerned herself only with the earthly side of the question.

‘Will Jane go to the door?’ she asked. ‘Suppose the Imp hears the knock and runs?’

This was what happened. Excited by the rare event of a double knock, the Imp, who usually refused to render domestic assistance, deserted his favourite pastime of knuckle-bones, and ran to admit the visitor.

‘Yes; Grandmamma was at home, but was upstairs mending stockings. She would come down in a

minute, if the lady would follow him to the drawing-room, where he would soon get Jane to light the fire. Ludovic and Judy heard the sound of steps as the lady's velvet mantle followed the Imp's disgraceful holland pinafore down the dark passage into the icily cold drawing-room.

'You must make this room decent, Judy,' said Ludovic, 'and bring her here. That drawing-room won't be warm before midnight, and it is only four o'clock now.'

Judy flung a muslin curtain over a basket of plain needlework, pushed chairs into their places, swept up crumbs from the carpet, and poked the fire into a blaze. A room which is used as day-nursery, dining-room, and sewing-room cannot assume a cultivated appearance in ten seconds. This one did not. The Imp rushed in as she was at work.

'Lady Winter—that's what she says her name is ; Grandmamma's sister.'

Judy and her brother exchanged glances.

They knew that the only one of Mrs. Hermann's family who had not completely cast her off when she married was her eldest sister, Lady Winter, but she had lived in Bombay until her husband's death, and since then, by slow degrees, the correspondence had dropped.

'Run and tell Grandmamma,' cried Judy, white with despair. 'Could anything be worse? Jane must be washing odds and ends in the back kitchen. The steps were not even clean. And the drawing-room curtains! Oh, Lu, what *will* she think of us?'

The unwelcome guest thought at that moment that she was bitterly cold. The gilt clock beneath its shivering glass case had stopped at twenty minutes to two. She wondered when the fire had last been lit. The muslin curtains looked like ladies after a ball, and shook, moreover, gently to and fro, showing that the windows admitted a torrent of draught. In the centre of the room stood a round table with illustrated books laid on it, at regular intervals.

'This is worse than I expected,' she said mentally. 'Much worse. Flora has sunk to her level.'

It was a theory of hers that people rose or sank to their natural level, no matter what the force of circumstances might be. She waited ten minutes, then the door opened, and a tall, slender young woman, dressed neatly in black, with wonderful dark-red hair, came in.

'My mother has asked me to apologise for having detained you so long. She is recovering from a severe headache.'

'You are——?'

‘Judith, her daughter. Will you come into the next room? There is a fire in it.’

Lady Winter was glad to hear the word fire, and amazed at her niece’s dignity. How strange to meet this beautiful creature in such bare surroundings, and how splendidly she did the duties of hostess! Not a syllable of apology, no fussiness, no jerking movements, no little forced laughs. She might have been born in the purple. Ludovic, tall, gaunt, and handsome, appeared next, and Lady Winter actually forgot to notice how badly cut his coat was. He looked much too imposing to be carelessly criticised. As he placed a stool for his aunt’s feet she actually found herself apologising, and saying, ‘Oh, never mind; don’t take such trouble.’ When at last Mrs. Hermann crept into the room, the sisters met, with a mutual start of amazement.

‘You have been ill, Rose,’ said Mrs. Hermann tremulously.

‘*I am* ill,’ replied Lady Winter, ‘and so, my poor Flora, are you.’

While she spoke, the painful incongruity between their Christian names and their faded wrinkled faces must have struck her, for she added quickly, ‘My name sounds unfamiliar. People should try, when christening their girls, to choose names which will not

be ludicrous in old age. Fidelia (Constance's daughter who lives with me) always says Aunt Winter, and I have not a single intimate friend left to call me Rose.'

'I am usually called Mother,' said Mrs. Hermann, coming close to the fire and seating herself on the threadbare sofa, while Judith slipped out to make tea.

'Your daughter is beautiful,' said Lady Winter, directly the door closed.

'Beautiful! Oh dear, we have never thought so. Ludovic is handsome, and very like our father. Do you see the likeness?'

'I do.'

'Victor is like our family too. My girls both resemble the other side of the house. But tell me about yourself. You wrote last from Riverscourt, where you meant to settle down, after all your journeys. Clive's education was finished, and you and he were hoping to make a home together, until he married.'

Lady Winter's face changed. She actually gasped for breath, and paused a perceptible time before saying, in a low voice: 'But I did not settle; I began to wander again. I visited old friends in Bombay, and stayed some months in Madeira. I went to America

and the West Indies. I am doomed to be restless. The longer I live, the more firmly I believe in Fate. There is no such thing as free agency.'

'And Clive?'

Lady Winter put up her hands with an appealing gesture, as if in pain.

'Don't ask me! I am not even sure if he is alive. We parted in some coldness. There was a trouble. That is all I can say.'

Mrs. Hermann cried silently for some moments. Her tears always stayed near the surface. One thought of Victor opened the flood-gates, but she felt sorry for her sister too—her rich sister, who proved to be more unhappy even than she.

'I came back to Riverscourt three months ago,' continued Lady Winter, 'and there I mean to remain. Just at present I am paying a visit of a week at Nunthorpe Abbey, and drove over at once to see you. I want to ask more about your children. Where has Judith been educated? Not at a boarding-school, I hope.'

'She has not been educated anywhere,' said her mother. 'Oh, I have had a terrible fight to bring them up. Boys must be educated, but girls can get on by picking up scraps here and there.'

'What a delusion!' cried Lady Winter. 'You

are deeply to blame, Flora. Of course, you should have written to me, and stated your difficulties.'

' I felt ashamed. And where would have been the use? Judith must not learn ideas above her station.'

' That depends upon what you call her station. She is my niece.'

The familiar exercise of lecturing Flora was so exhilarating to Lady Winter that her spirits rose, and she looked and spoke as she used to do, in days long since past.

' It is shocking that such a beautiful girl should have grown up without training. Constance has done very foolishly by her family too. She married a second time, you know, and her eldest daughter lives with me. But the arrangement is not happy. I cannot understand the prejudices of these modern young women. Now, I dare say Judith spends her days among her own friends, or in visiting the poor, and neglects you ? '

' In visiting the poor ! ' cried Mrs. Hermann. ' She needn't go far if she wanted to do that ; but Judith would never dream of such a thing. She is wonderfully useful. I am sure it amazes me the amount of work she gets through. But her tastes are all for frivolity. And lately some idea of coming out on the stage has laid hold of her. She is an

exquisite dancer. Three years ago her father refused his permission, but now she is of age, and, I believe, means to decide the question for herself.'

'Flora,' exclaimed Lady Winter, quite awful in her compressed indignation, 'you really have been deeply to blame!'

Mrs. Hermann burst into tears a second time, just as the door opened to admit Judith and the tea-tray.

CHAPTER IV

‘YOUR mother tells me you are shockingly ignorant, Judith,’ said Lady Winter, by way of opening the conversation pleasantly. ‘What can you do?’

‘I can read,’ said Judith slowly, as if counting her accomplishments, ‘and I write—rather badly. I can sew—a little, and I know that twice two make four.’

‘She doesn’t know nine times,’ cried the Imp, who had followed a plate of muffins into the room. ‘She only says up to five times. That’s not enough.’

‘Who is that child?’ asked the terrible old lady, looking fixedly at him.

‘Bertha’s eldest boy. She has two others. Philip, run and tell your brother and sister to come——’

‘Not on my account,’ said Lady Winter, turning again to Judith, and continuing her examination.

‘Can you play and sing?’

‘Not a note.’

Mrs. Hermann, on hearing this astonishing falsehood, turned pale, and ejaculated ‘*Oh!*’ but Judith gave a side glance to beg for silence, and Lady Winter observed none of the byplay.

‘That is odd, when your father is a musician by profession. You have been very idle; but you hold yourself well, and your mother says you are a good dancer. Of course you speak no language but your own?’

‘And that very imperfectly,’ remarked Judith. ‘I am fluent enough, but I don’t know my parts of speech, and I never learnt the rules of grammar. In fact, I am ignorant of everything it concerns a young woman to know.’

She rose up and began to attend to her mother’s empty teacup, bestowing a pat and a piece of cake on the Imp as she passed him. Lady Winter seemed buried in thought.

‘I think, Flora, it might do the girl good to visit me,’ she said at last. ‘For a week or two at first, just to let me see how she gets on with Fidelia, and what improvement she makes generally. Then, if I found there was progress, she could stay six months, or even a year. I should engage a staff of masters, and make arrangements for a course of regular study. By the way, I suppose your children were brought up

as Christians? But of course they were. You would never neglect anything so obvious.'

'I may as well tell you at once,' said Judith, in a low voice, 'that I am not a Christian. And I decline your invitation. I don't choose to be educated at your expense, or to receive the very smallest favour from you.'

'Judith!' cried Mrs. Hermann, in great distress. 'How can you speak so rudely in return for your aunt's kindness?'

'Kindness!' cried Judith. 'Oh, don't use the word. Some gifts hurt just like a blow in the face. I don't wish to offend you, Lady Winter. You are my mother's sister, and perhaps you don't understand how wounding it is to be patronised. But I know that we can never like each other. You have no real sympathy with us. You came here to find fault, to show your superiority, not to share our burdens. Help given in that way becomes an insult.'

'Judith!' cried Mrs. Hermann a second time. 'For pity's sake be quiet!'

'Never mind, Flora,' said Lady Winter. 'There's no use in trying to befriend young people. I have learnt my lesson.'

'There would have been use twenty years ago,' said Judith. 'If you had come when I was a little

child you might have helped me. But you have left us alone till the saddest part of our lives is over. You knew Mother was poor and in bad health, and hunted down by poverty, and yet you never felt driven here by the longing to see her. You wrote patronising letters, scolding her for things she could not help. You sent advice she wasn't able to act upon, and presents which were of no use to us at all. And now, when we are grown up, for some reason I can't understand, you come to call, and find that she hasn't been able to pay for education, and insult her and me by questions and implied blame. I am ignorant, and I wish to be ignorant. I am not a Christian, and I never mean to become one. There's no need to discuss things any more.'

'Am I to understand,' said Lady Winter, 'that you have adopted your father's religion?'

'My father's people object to Christians as much as you object to Jews,' said Judith. 'That may strike you as odd, but it is true. They cut him and his children off a long time ago. We are outside all religions, Ludovic and I. Bertha might suit you better, for she has gone over to the stronger side. She professes herself a convert.'

Lady Winter had looked troubled while Judith was alluding to their early struggles, and the poverty

which had dragged them down. Her thin yellow hands kept clasping and unclasping each other nervously. Mrs. Hermann was too terrified to move. The Imp, who could see no opportunity of distinguishing himself, had slipped away ten minutes before to the kitchen. Judith, still wonderfully quiet, began to collect the empty tea-cups, and put a cushion behind her mother's back.

At last Lady Winter rose, with an immense effort, and turned to Mrs. Hermann. Her face had changed during the last few minutes. It wore now an expression of acute suffering, which seemed out of accord with those waxen, statuesque features, and was made doubly pathetic by force of contrast. Either she cared more for her sister's family than at first appeared, or else some terrible memories of the past had been evoked by Judith's indignant words.

'I am old, Flora,' she said, 'seventy-one yesterday, and in weak health. My nerves have had several severe shocks to bear. These scenes tax all that is left of my strength. Perhaps I have been to blame as regards you. I ought to have known your children earlier. But the years slipped by like water, and my own anxieties ate me up. As to you, Judith, I have only two things to say—When I was a girl, it was never considered the duty of the young to point

out their sins and transgressions to the old. We may have seen them. We never spoke of them, or if we did, it was under our breath. These ideas are out of date now. You have given me your frank opinion, and I know that I seem to you a very cruel woman, who came here only to poke and pry.'

'No, no,' interrupted Mrs. Hermann, 'Judith did not mean that.'

'Yes, she did mean exactly that. And, on the whole, the new system has its advantages. Better give open expression to a grievance than nurse bitter thoughts in the mind, to come out in hatred after we old ones are dead. You have said all you felt about me, my dear niece, so perhaps you will have a kind word for me when I am in my coffin. That time is not far off. But I must add something more. I have been young, and remember it, so I can understand your position. You have never been old, so it is impossible for you to understand mine. Youth and age never meet on equal terms. Good-bye.'

But Judith could not take the hand which was held out.

'Oh, do forgive me!' she said. 'I never meant to hurt you so terribly.'

'I should be unreasonable if I were terribly hurt,' replied Lady Winter. 'I have all my life, perhaps,

been too autocratic. When I see young creatures doing their best to make themselves wretched, I cannot rid myself of a desire to seize hold of them and prevent it. The fact is, I am always positive my own way is best. But this failing we share between us, and it is surely much more excusable in me than in you.'

Horrid remorse laid hold of Judith, as if she had struck a lame person or pushed a blind one into the gutter.

'I did not understand,' she cried. 'Let me come and stay with you; I should like to. I can learn a few things, perhaps. At all events you will see I am not a savage or a vixen. I shall never forgive myself unless you do.'

'To-morrow—I will write to-morrow,' said Lady Winter. 'I must go now. I am very tired. The carriage is at the door, I think. It is a long drive to the Abbey. Good-bye, Flora. No, we needn't kiss each other as if I were starting for the North Pole. I shall write to-morrow.'

'What happened?' said Judith, directly the carriage had driven off. 'Did she say I might go to stay with her or not? Have I hurt her too much? Oh, do tell me what it all means!'

'Something has gone wrong with Clive,' said Mrs.

Hermann. ‘She never cared for any one while he was there. She was thinking of him all the time. But you behaved shockingly, Judith. I can’t tell you how I feel about it. I would have given all I possess to prevent her coming if I had known you would speak as you did. Now she is offended for life, and I have lost the only one of my family who has said a kind word to me for years.’

Mrs. Hermann’s predictions were not fulfilled. The next day’s post brought a letter from Lady Winter—

‘MY DEAR NIECE,—I am going home on Saturday. After what passed yesterday afternoon I shall not ask you to pay me a visit, but if you are still of the same mind you were then, and think you would care to come, I shall be very glad to take you with me. Three weeks will show whether we are going to like each other.

‘Yours very sincerely,
‘ROSE WINTER.’

‘Of course you must accept,’ cried Mrs. Hermann, Bertha, and Ludovic, all in one breath. Even the Imp, not knowing what he was assenting to, chimed in, ‘Yes, she must accept.’

So Judith’s fate was sealed, amid family acclamation.

CHAPTER V

It was late in the afternoon of the twentieth of January when Judith first made acquaintance with her new home. The day had been full of surprises, but she was a being who took surprises calmly, and never allowed any one to guess that her previous life had not prepared her for them. Riverscourt was the greatest surprise of all. It was an ancient, weather-beaten house, one part of which had witnessed the civil wars, while another part was comparatively modern. Judith liked the modern part best. She thought the leafless trees and smooth velvet lawns in front of the drawing-room windows very depressing. The soft blue haze over the distance where smoke was going up from cottage chimneys, and the delicate outline of hills could be seen, failed to impress her. There can be no doubt her tastes were Philistine. Inside the house she received a positive shock. Dark curtains, faded carpets, furniture which had known its best days ! What could everybody be dreaming of ?

'I suppose it is because Aunt Winter only rents this house that such shabby things are allowed to stay here.'

She made this remark one day to Fidelia, who bestowed on her a curious inquiring look, as if she had been a hitherto undiscovered animal, and said, 'Oh, don't you know old things are best?'

'I didn't know it,' replied Judith. 'They never seem so to me. Explain.'

'It would take too long,' said Fidelia, dreamily.

'But if old things are best, why not send for new tables and chairs from Maple's, and every year they would grow more valuable.'

'No, no, they never could be valuable.'

'Why not?'

Fidelia remained dumb.

She herself perplexed her cousin quite as much as the carpets. All the way to Riverscourt Judith had been picturing the meeting which must shortly take place, wondering, rather anxiously, whether her own shabby frocks and general absence of style would cause offence or give occasion to merriment. She supposed Fidelia would receive them in the hall, and look her over from head to foot, as if pricing each article she had on. Madame Hortense never failed to do that when welcoming a new pupil. But it was otherwise everything happened.

Lady Winter and she arrived before any one expected them, to judge by appearances. They had tea, and were on the point of going upstairs, when the drawing-room door opened, and a tall very thin young woman came in, carrying a cord bag. Her face was pale, her hands red and frost-bitten, her eyes had a peculiar fixity of expression.

'I am sorry I was not at home, Aunt Winter,' she said, and then Judith noticed her dress was of the coarsest black serge, made as plainly as possible; though worn with extreme neatness. A black bonnet and waterproof cloak completed her costume.

'Don't apologise,' said Lady Winter. 'I never expected to see you sooner. Here is your cousin.'

Fidelia gave Judith one of her strange dreamy looks, and Judith responded with a glance of shocked pity.

'She is wonderfully handsome,' thought Fidelia. 'Aunt Winter will make her as worldly as herself, unless I get an influence for good.'

'She looks as if sixpence would pay for everything she has on,' thought Judith; 'and her hands are actually covered with chilblains. Yet, she must have plenty of money. What does it all mean?'

This question recurred frequently, and never found a satisfactory answer. Other heads, more ex-

perienced than Judith's, found Fidelia hard to understand. Most of her acquaintances held opposite opinions. One said she reminded him of the Inquisition. Another wrote to her twice a day, and kept her photograph on the dressing-table. Two or three stood every Sunday, in fine weather or wet, outside the church door for the pleasure of shaking hands with her as she came out, while some more, hardly less intimate, asserted that the touch of her fingers chilled them to the vitals. Discussions about her character had been known to keep people up till two in the morning, and then they separated without coming to a decision. The poor at Riverscourt had no doubts. They thought she was a saint, who earned heaven by reason of her good works to them. It must be said they showed great willingness to assist her in winning merit.

By degrees all strangeness wore off, and Judith became completely at home in her surroundings, even the servants ceasing to have any terrors for her. The life she lived was not an exciting one. Their most frequent visitor was a nephew of Lady Winter's husband, the curate in charge of the parish. Judith, not being learned in such matters, only apprehended by slow degrees that the rector was permanently absent, for reasons not mentioned to his flock. He

was never missed. Herbert Winter and Fidelia together could have done the work of five parishes instead of one, and scarcely been exhausted. Their energy surpassed that of any human beings Judith had seen or heard of. Most people want to rest sometimes. They never rested. From early morning till late at night their hands and feet were constantly in movement, and when nothing more could be done at Riverscourt they turned their attention to Deepdell, the adjoining village. After one long look at the new comer, Herbert never showed the least interest in her. He was a slight spare man, with sharp features, thin hair, and a remarkably sweet rich voice.

Another friend who came to see Lady Winter was Denis Field, the owner of Riverscourt, and an old college chum of Herbert's. It was he who once said that Fidelia reminded him of the 'Inquisition.' Judith liked him very much, because he was good-natured, tolerably handsome, and averse to serious conversation. She regarded him with extra complacency on account of his wealth, which, in her eyes, seemed magnificent. Until then, life had never introduced her to a man who owned so many houses that he was puzzled which to live in.

Besides Herbert Winter and Denis Field, her new

acquaintance included a quiet lady of uncertain age, named Miss Felkin. This poor creature acted as chaperone to Fidelia, reader to Lady Winter, and chorus in general society. She was very obliging, and gave the impression of being an unselfish person, who felt deeply interested in every event, however small, that happened in the family. Judith pitied her enormously, and wondered she had not taken poison years ago.

Lady Winter showed active kindness to the bird of strange feather. She sent for new dresses from London, new shoes, new hats, new gloves, a new umbrella. Worldly minded Judith, who had never possessed a complete set of new garments before, was half out of her senses with joy. Sometimes, in the course of her twenty-one years, she had been able to buy a nice dress, but then her shoes had failed to do it credit, or, if the shoes were all they ought to be, her pocket-handkerchiefs were in holes. Contrive as best she might, one part of her dress always blushed to own the other. Now, for the first time in her recollection, she was apparelled suitably from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, and the circumstance justified glee.

One evening stayed in her memory as particularly blissful. A box had arrived from London, and, alone

in her room, dispensing with the help of a maid, she arranged her beautiful hair, put on a pair of shoes which might have been made for Cinderella, and then robed herself in a gown of shimmering cream-coloured silk. When all was finished, she stood in front of an old-fashioned cheval glass, and gave a cry of astonishment. Could that lovely girl really be herself, Judy Hermann? There is a story somewhere of a French woman, who said that the consciousness of having on a perfectly fitting dress gave her an inward peace and deep satisfaction which religion was powerless to impart. Judith shared her feelings in that moment of supreme self-approval. Then, being on the whole a nice girl, and not devoid of gratitude, she put out the candles which had assisted at this function and went to thank her aunt. Lady Winter surveyed her with languid admiration.

‘ You look very beautiful,’ she said, ‘ but there is no particular need to tell you so, for I see you know it already.’

‘ I wanted to thank you,’ began Judith.

‘ Oh, don’t do that now! Wait ten years.’

Judith went upstairs, thinking about this speech, and passed Fidelia, who gazed in surprise.

‘ I had forgotten Mr. Field’s ball,’ she said. ‘ You are going, of course. You need a pearl necklace.’

‘Yes, I do. I have a string of imitation pearls, but it is horrid wearing shams.’

‘Oh, do you feel like that?’ replied Fidelia. ‘I should not mind. Jewels seem to me very evil things; I had rather wear paste, which cost comparatively little. My own pearls I sold years ago, or you should have them.’

‘You sold your pearls?’

‘Yes, to give to the poor.’

‘Was not that a pity? You may need them some day.’

‘Never!’ said Fidelia. ‘The whole idea of decorating ourselves is selfish. We were born with so much, while others have nothing at all, cruelly little. I feel forced to give away from my abundance.’

‘But I was not born with abundance,’ said Judith. ‘I am one of the poor.’

‘You were never hungry,’ observed Fidelia, ‘or cold, or ragged.’

‘I have shivered with cold often, and I was generally ragged. Hungry? No. There was always bread and treacle to be had.’

Fidelia was too serious to laugh.

‘That is not real poverty,’ she said. ‘By the poor, I mean those whose natural instincts are crushed.’

'Then you are the poorest of all,' said Judith. 'What's the use of adding to the numbers of the restricted ones by making yourself unhappy? There is surely no sense in that. If you were a Roman Catholic, I should understand, for of course we know they approve of being miserable. But as things are—'

'It is very strange to hear you speak in this way,' said Fidelia gently. 'I can scarcely forgive the Reformation for having introduced schism. If we all belonged to one fold, such bewilderment as yours would be impossible. The ignorant and unlearned are forced now to discover religion for themselves; each one begins from the very beginning. Before saying "The sun shines," we must define the theory of light. This is what the Reformation has brought us to.'

'I don't follow,' said Judith. 'What is the Reformation? I never heard of it.'

Fidelia blushed a little. It was not her way to argue, and, besides, Judith's ignorance was too appalling. She could scarcely believe it was sincere.

A few hours later, in an interval between dances, Mr. Field rallied his companion on her exceeding thoughtfulness.

‘I was thinking about Fidelia,’ replied Judith. ‘Is she a saint, or a little bit out of her mind? It must be one thing or the other.’

‘A mixture of both?’

‘No, no; saints are always in their right minds.’

‘She is odd,’ said Mr. Field; ‘Fidelia is undoubtedly odd. Don’t think too much about her.’

‘But she keeps thinking of me. I meet her eyes fastened on me with such a strange searching look. And this evening she said my ignorance was due to the Reformation.’

‘That’s a good idea,’ said Mr. Field, chuckling. ‘The Reformation is welcome to my shortcomings. I haven’t time to read and discuss. It is the labour of years to tell one’s right hand from one’s left in these matters. Yes, it is all the fault of that priggish Reformation.’

‘But I want to know what the Reformation was,’ said Judith. ‘I can’t get any one to tell me.’

‘Oh, you remember how it all came about?’

‘No; that’s just what I don’t know. I never heard of it.’

‘Never heard of the Reformation? Oh, Miss Judith, you *must* have heard of it.’

'But I have *not*,' said Judith, pouting. 'Should I ask if I knew? I want you to tell me.'

'I don't think I can, just now,' said Mr. Field. 'It is such a vast subject. The Reformation—let me see! Ask Herbert to tell you. *He* knows.'

CHAPTER VI

At the end of three weeks Judith reminded Lady Winter that the limit of her visit had come.

‘I had better go home now,’ she said.

‘Do you hate me too much to stay?’ asked her aunt.

‘No; I like you more every week.’

‘Then wait till I tell you I don’t need you any more, or until your mother telegraphs for you.’

Judith waited three weeks longer. No one had grown weary of her company in that time. The house was now full of young people, for all the families in the neighbourhood sent deputations to call on Lady Winter’s new niece. They asked her to luncheon parties, and dinner parties, and balls, and talked of lawn tennis and boating which should be in the summer.

‘Who is she?’ every one asked. ‘Why do they call her Miss Hermann? She’s not a German, that’s easy to see.’

'She's perfectly uneducated,' said some of the mothers.

'But she's awfully nice,' replied all the sons.

Judith turned into that marvellous creature, 'a Social Success.' Her red hair was like Henry of Navarre's white plume—wherever it went victory followed. One great charm was her absence of affectation. An unaffected beauty is as rare as a black tulip. Then she was kind to less favoured girls; never trying to steal triumphs from them, or to show off her own gifts and graces at their expense.

'Oh, I am not in good voice,' she would tell people. 'I should squall like a peacock if I attempted that ballad. Ask Miss Vernon; perhaps she will be good-natured and sing for you.'

When every one laughed at a *bon mot* of hers, she cried: 'I am not responsible. It was Doris who said that first. Ask *her* what she meant by it.'

And the blushing Doris had to defend some jest which Judith had certainly suggested, if not actually clothed in words.

At home she was just as good-natured as in society. Meek Miss Felkin protested at first when Judith took her letters to the post-box in the hall, and executed commissions for her in the village.

'My dear,' she would say, 'remember your position.'

Judith only laughed. She sat with Lady Winter to let the companion go out walking. She read novels and essays aloud by the hour ; she made tea better than any one in the house, and, while doing these things and fifty more besides, gave the impression of being wholly bent upon her own amusement. It was most mysterious.

'I want to dress your hair differently,' she said one day to Miss Felkin. 'You would look ever so much prettier if you wore it turned back from your forehead and waved.'

'Pretty ! Oh, my dear !' cried Miss Felkin. 'I never could look pretty. It wouldn't become me. And who would care to see me with my hair turned back ?'

'I should.'

'But Lady Winter ?'

'She will be delighted. Let me try. No one as young as you should wear a cap.'

That evening Miss Felkin came down blushing like a girl, her whole appearance having undergone some marvellous change. Even Fidelia saw 'something' had happened, but could not discover what it was.

'You look very well to-day,' said Lady Winter. 'I think Riverscourt suits you. A mild, relaxing climate is evidently what you require.'

'Do you hear that, you foolish dear?' whispered Judith. 'There's a compliment for me. Now, put on that old-maidish cap again, if you dare.'

At the end of six weeks desperate longing to see Ludovic laid hold of his sister's heart.

'I must go home, Aunt Winter,' she said. 'I can't exist without him any longer.'

'This is ridiculous,' said Lady Winter. 'Young men don't want their sisters hanging round.'

'Oh, he's not that kind,' said Judith. 'He and I mean always to live together.'

Whenever Judy made rash speeches about the future, some stronger power seemed resolved to interfere. The words had scarcely left her mouth before a servant came in carrying a tray with a letter.

'What's the matter?' asked Lady Winter.

'He is going,' replied Judith, in a very low voice, 'Ludovic—to Buenos Ayres. Oh, I ought never to have left home.'

'Let me see,' said her aunt; but the words were clear enough. Ludovic had received an offer of a clerkship in Buenos Ayres, with a fairly good salary, and meant to sail in three weeks.

‘It had to come, Judy,’ he said; ‘I couldn’t have dragged on at home much longer. Now, don’t break your dear heart, thinking you could have prevented this by staying in Rivington. Life has been grisly without you, but I was fretting a little before you went. I tried not to let you see how much. In five years I shall come back. Perhaps before then you might come out and join me.’

‘I shall go out with him,’ said Judith.

‘Nonsense,’ cried her aunt. ‘You shall do nothing of the kind. He would be made miserable by anxiety. Go out with him! What a mad idea!’

‘I could take care of him.’

‘No, you couldn’t. Young men have their own ways of managing. He speaks of living with three others—Englishmen, like himself. And it is perfectly true that when he comes back his position will have gone up, and he will be able to command his own affairs. He has plenty of energy, and a fund of good sense.’

‘But I must go home at once,’ said Judith. ‘This very minute! His things ought to be packed and put in order, and I want to talk to him, to say a hundred things.’

She did go, though not that very minute, having first promised to return to Riverscourt as soon as his

ship sailed. They all felt they could not spare her a day longer than necessary.

Three weeks of long-drawn-out parting! Who can describe them? Lady Winter sent twenty pounds for the outfit, and Judith added to this sum from her own savings. Much as she loved money, she loved Ludovic more. Her joy in her own good fortune was now sadly tarnished. When her brother met her at the station, dressed in his shabby overcoat, she felt annoyed with her own sealskin jacket and sable muff.

‘ You are a Grand-Duchess now, Judith,’ he said, touching her sleeve affectionately; and tears rushed to her eyes.

‘ I thought it would be so nice coming home and showing you my pretty dresses, and the presents I had for you; but it is not as I expected, at all.’

‘ Things never are, are they?’ said Ludovic.

‘ I have money to get you all you need. Aunt Winter sent twenty pounds, and I have ten more of my own.’

‘ I thought she hated me,’ said Ludovic, while the faint shadow of a smile passed over his face. ‘ She looked as if she did. It is wonderful she should take any trouble to dress *me* up. As for your ten pounds, you dear old Judy, I will put them in a bag and tie them round my neck and keep them in remembrance

of you. They are much too nice to spend, those ten pounds.'

Judith went with him to choose his coats and hats, and was very particular about the quality of his shirts. Every detail passed under her inspection, while Mrs. Hermann walked helplessly about the house, and Bertha attended to the cooking of the meals, and the children. His handkerchiefs she marked herself, embroidering the letters L. H. with exquisite neatness. Sometimes, in the midst of her work, the idea that five years must pass before they saw each other again caused her to drop her needle and scissors, and hide her face on the table, in agony too deep for tears. How can love be kept alive during years of absence? She thought of many plans, and discarded them all. To defy the law of change is a task as hopeless as reining back the ocean. Mrs. Partington, with her traditional mop, was not more feeble than Judith.

The last night came, and she packed the box, destined for his cabin, in that comfortless attic where they had slept as children.

'Poor old Aubrey,' said Ludovic.

'I am glad he is not here,' replied Judith. 'I must have you to myself this last evening.'

'But you will write and tell him everything.'

'Oh yes. I will write. I shall be glad to talk to

some one who knows you and cares for the past. Never mind him now.'

A box fell on the floor, and Ludovic picked it up.

'What's this? Something green and cloudy.'

'It is moss agate. Mr. Field gave it to me. I am putting it in because you will need a place for postage stamps.'

'But, if it was his present?'

'That doesn't signify; he won't care. I will tell him, if you like, and ask him not to be offended. They all gave me presents on my birthday; this was his.'

'Do you care for none of them?' asked Ludovic.

'Not a scrap. If you were with me and happy (not fretting), I shouldn't mind if every one else were drowned.'

'I wish it could be different,' said her brother, with a sigh. 'I shall want to choke your lover when he comes, but still—— you will suffer so terribly, and I shall know I have been cruel and——'

'You couldn't help wanting to go,' cried Judith; and then she burst into tears, a weakness she had never allowed herself till that moment, and cried bitterly, with her arms round Ludovic's neck and her face squeezed against his shoulder. Afterwards she wondered if slave women used to feel like this when

their best beloveds were divided from them, or the sisters of soldiers and sailors, who say ‘Good-bye’ scarcely hoping to meet again on earth. It seemed to her that no later joy could compensate such anguish.

All was over at last; the ship beyond the harbour bar, and one poor little half-broken heart left to pick up crumbs of consolation as best it might.

CHAPTER VII

It was a very quiet Judith who came back to Rivers-court, so quiet that her friends there regretted the change. More than any one, Lady Winter regretted it, and, in order to make a diversion, she took the unusual step of going to London for the months of May and June.

‘Girls ought to see something of the world,’ she said. ‘Fidelia loves to bury herself in the country, but that’s no reason Judith should.’

Judith agreed with these ideas. She wanted to make the world’s acquaintance, if only for the pleasure of saying that it was not so attractive as she expected.

‘Remember, I shall wish you to carry on your studies,’ continued Lady Winter. ‘A lady shall come to talk French with you. It is extraordinary not to know French. And you really must attend some Shakespeare classes.’

Judith thought it her duty to utter a protest, but

again her own opinion coincided with her aunt's. She felt mortified when French was quoted, making her ignorance conspicuous. One day Mr. Field complained that he had no 'sang-froid' (a great mistake of his, he had plenty), and Judith innocently enquired, 'What's that?' 'Oh, Miss Judith,' he said, 'you know.' But this time he did not advise her to ask Herbert, as he had done when the Reformation was under discussion.

It was perplexing, also, when people spoke of Hamlet and Ophelia as if they were characters who lived in the next street, taking for granted that she had known and loved them for years. Miss Felkin accompanied her to the Lyceum when she went to see this play, and her tears were so abundant that the poor companion felt terrified, never dreaming the story was entirely new. This lack of learning at all events saved Judith from the sins of the pedantic ones, and when she did discover literature her eagerness was comical.

'Tell me about Australia,' she said once to Mr. Field. 'Is the moon really so brilliant that people can read small print all night long? Pisistratus says so.'

'Who said so?' asked Mr. Field, thinking her mind had gone astray, till he discovered she was referring to the novel of 'The Caxtons.'

‘I have found such a beautiful poem,’ she told him on another occasion. ‘I wonder the whole world doesn’t talk of it. People talk of such silly poems, but no one speaks of this. I read it in an album somewhere. It is called “Isabella, or the Pot of Basil.” Have you heard of it?’

‘Yes; I think I have heard of it,’ said Mr. Field, whose ignorance of poetry was scarcely less conspicuous than her own.

‘Well, isn’t it beautiful?’ I read it aloud to Miss Felkin, while she was making *pot-pourri*. Why doesn’t every one talk about it?’

‘Oh, that is Keats, you know,’ replied Mr. Field. ‘People don’t exactly talk about Keats; but I wish you would let me come and listen while you read it, and Miss Felkin makes *pot-pourri*. That would be a treat to remember.’

‘Oh, I will,’ said Judith. ‘I love that poem.’

Lady Winter encouraged Mr. Field’s visits, which grew more and more frequent. He used to complain that modern young ladies were too clever for him—a fact scarcely to be wondered at, as he never read anything but the *Standard* and the *Sporting Times*.

Judith’s ignorance kept his own company, and saved his self-respect. Several times he noticed that letters came for her with the Paris postmark. Once

a pen-and-ink drawing fell out of the envelope, a wonderfully pretty drawing too.

'An old friend of mine has sent me this,' said Judy. 'A sketch of the inside of his room. He is studying art in Paris.'

'And he wants you to see what his room is like?'

'Naturally. We have been a sort of sister and brother for years—not real ones—make-believes.'

'But you take an interest in him?'

'Well, of course!' cried Judith; and she told Mr. Field as much as she herself knew about Aubrey, until his heart felt rather constricted.

'Does Lady Winter know you correspond?' he said. 'It seems to me——'

'Oh, she wouldn't mind.'

'But is it fair? Think of the poor fellow himself. He is no doubt madly in love.'

'He isn't anything so absurd,' said Judith. 'He knows such things are impossible. He is too poor.'

Mr. Field was very deeply in love himself, but a slight shudder passed over him when his beautiful lady betrayed her love of money so obviously.

'Poverty is not a vice,' he remarked.

'It is a bar on marriage,' said Judith. 'You don't know what it means. I do.'

‘We can all guess what it means.’

‘Impossible. Guessing is of no use.’

‘It means economy and self-denial.’

‘It means reckless imprudence. When people are really poor do you think they save? Not a bit. There is no motive, when the whole comes to ten shillings perhaps at the end of ten years.’

‘Well, saving may be difficult, but I know poverty means hardship which can be bravely borne.’

‘It means a horrid little house,’ said Judith, ‘where you can tell each time a meal is cooked. It means draggle-tailed maids-of-all-work, soiled white curtains, shabby oilcloth in the passage, mud, omnibuses, and degradation.’

‘Then you would never marry a poor man, however much you loved him?’

‘I never should let myself love him. Aubrey knows that. So our friendship is safe.’

‘Poor dog!’ said Field, compassionately. ‘I hope he quite understands that he must never aspire further.’

Judith’s outspoken appreciation of physical comfort shocked his taste. On his way home he thought of Fidelia, and her rapt expression and worn-out garments seemed for the moment perfectly beautiful. After a while he tried to make excuses for Judith.

She had no doubt suffered terribly, and her sincerity atoned for much. A few days later she gave him still stronger testimony to her truthfulness. They met at a garden party, and wandered off by themselves, listening to the music of a brass band at pleasurable distance.

‘How picturesque those Hindu women look among a crowd of Christians like ourselves !’ said Field.

‘I am not a Christian,’ observed Judith.

‘Don’t do yourself injustice,’ replied her companion. ‘You are a better Christian than most, I am sure.’

‘I am not a Christian at all,’ said Judith, turning her great brown eyes full on his face. ‘I have never been christened, only you needn’t tell Fidelia.’

‘That’s unusual, isn’t it ?’ remarked Field. ‘You are not a Quaker, surely ?’

And he laughed.

‘My father is a Jew,’ said Judith. ‘At least he was once. Hermann is not his real name. He only assumed it when he played first at concerts.’

‘There’s not much in a name,’ said Field, trying to speak carelessly.

‘I don’t know about that. My own family name is not so pretty as Hermann. You wouldn’t like it if you heard it.

'But as you have not kept your father's religion, you might as well adopt your mother's,' urged Field.
'There's no difficulty.'

'There would be in my case,' replied Judith. 'I couldn't unless I believed it. My sister did as you advise. She was christened, confirmed, and married, all in one fortnight. I had rather choose a stake and a tar barrel than perjure myself in that way.'

'What were you saying to Denis about a stake and a tar barrel?' asked Lady Winter. 'I saw him laugh.'

'I was telling him I cannot believe the Christian religion,' said Judith.

'Then he did right to laugh,' replied her aunt. 'You are sometimes very foolish, Judith. Talk about subjects you understand.'

Lady Winter was a clever woman, but in this instance her cleverness was at fault.

Fear of making themselves ridiculous keeps many young creatures within the bounds their guardians assign to them. It had no effect at all upon Judith.

CHAPTER VIII

VERY soon after the family returned to Riverscourt Mr. Field disappeared for a few days—a circumstance which annoyed Lady Winter more than it ought to have done.

‘I hope you have not been trifling with him,’ she said severely to her niece. ‘Your behaviour is too flighty—cold one morning, hot the next. How can you expect any one to bear with you?’

Judith, for once in her life, had no retort ready, and therefore said nothing. The truth was that Denis had already asked her to marry him, and she had replied by the strange request that he should go away from home for a week or a fortnight.

‘I can’t think while he is here,’ she said to Fidelia, who, oddly enough, had possessed her confidence on this subject from the beginning. ‘Of course, I know I must say *Yes*; that’s a foregone conclusion. But I want to bewail my fate—like Jephthah’s daughter—among the mountains, for a few days first.’

'If you feel like that,' said Fidelia, 'you ought by no means to say yes.'

'It makes no difference whom I promise to marry,' replied Judith. 'I should hate him, whoever he was, when the day came round. I believe my vocation is to be a nun.'

'If you think so,' said Fidelia, 'for Heaven's sake don't strangle the impulse.'

'But when the time came to renounce the world, I should love it more than ever,' continued Judith. 'Oh, there's no use complaining. He's sensible enough, I am sure, and kind, though at times he bores me. Aunt Winter says people don't bore each other after marriage as they do before. They can talk about the kitchen coals, I suppose, or settle the colour of the window curtains.'

When Denis came back from this compulsory pilgrimage his cause suffered another shock. Lady Winter's health was failing.

'I can't think of anything while she is ill,' said Judith. 'Wait a little longer.'

He waited several months. Lady Winter grew worse instead of better, fading visibly, though slowly, before every one's eyes, and never uttering a word of complaint. Her chief longing was for a letter which did not come. She spoke of it, in her disturbed

sleep, and looked hungrily at the postman, as he walked up the drive. When a heap of envelopes was brought to her, the result of his visit, she glanced at the addresses, then tossed them away unread. Judith knew what this meant well enough. Her aunt and she possessed a common bond. They each wished for foreign letters, and only one handwriting could satisfy them. Any other was false coin. But while many came from Ludovic, Clive remained silent.

‘He is dead,’ said Lady Winter, quite suddenly, one day to her niece.

‘I think he may feel ashamed to write,’ replied Judith.

She did not ask to whom the pronoun referred, though her cousin’s name had never been mentioned since the day she came to Riverscourt.

‘That’s not possible,’ said her aunt, ‘not possible. If I thought he were living and did not write to me, my heart would break. I have suffered a great deal—I must have done, since I can bring myself to wish he were dead. Ten years of silence! ——Judith?’

‘Yes, dear ! ’

‘He wanted to marry a girl of no family. Her father died of delirium tremens. She had grown up

like a weed. Her brothers were coarse, half-educated men. It was perfectly shocking. She married some one else ; a country surgeon, I believe. Then trouble came between us.'

'I understand.'

'He thought I acted a double part, that I manœuvred. It was to save him from misery ; but men in love are unreasonable. It is hard that they should turn against those who have cared for them from the beginning. I was tossed aside like an old glove when he gave his heart to this child. Yet I did all for the best.'

During these melancholy days, and others which followed, Judith rarely left the house for more than an hour at a time. If the invalid awoke and found her gone, she was subject to accessions of terror. Miss Felkin proved useful, and Catford, the maid ; but no one equalled Judith. One evening her aunt called her to the sofa.

'I have had a dream,' she said, 'that greatly comforts me. I thought he came in, carrying a white lily. He used to be fond of flowers. I said, "Oh, where did you get that? This is not the season for lilies." And voices behind, such voices ! sang "*These are they in dazzling whiteness.*" Now I know he is beyond the reach of trouble. I needn't

fear he is suffering want, or too much hurt with me to send a message. Oh, I have done him great injustice ! When I see him I shall ask his forgiveness. Judith, I am right, am I not, in believing he is dead ? You agree with me, that he is dead ?'

'Yes, you are right,' said Judith. 'He is beyond trouble, and he has left off being hurt with you any more.'

From that time, Lady Winter never relinquished the idea that death explained the mysterious silence of her son. She often spoke of him, but with great cheerfulness, going back to the old days before discord had arisen between them, and saying that his presence was constantly about her.

'Isn't it wonderful the way death brings our friends near us ?' she said once. 'An ocean may have divided us before, but afterwards, we might all be in the same room.'

'I have no experience,' said Judith. 'I don't know.'

'Some day you will know,' replied her aunt, in the gentle tone which had now become habitual to her.

These things struck Judith as very strange, in the light of later events. November went by, sadly enough, and December began. Christmas was within

sight, making Fidelia's duties more arduous even than usual. It is possible that she felt a few jealous pangs at being excluded from the sick-room, where Judith, the new comer, was indispensable, but her sweetness of temper and strong principle kept such feelings under control. Her character never showed in better light than during these weeks of anxiety. Catford was occasionally irritable, and even the meek Felkin had moments of vexation, when an untrained girl satisfied the doctors better than she ; but it seemed impossible for Fidelia ever to remember her own existence.

On the second of December, when Judith came back from a ride with Denis, a stout, middle-aged man passed her in the hall, casting a look of much interest in her direction as he did so. Visitors were unfrequent at that hour, and this one puzzled her. Admiration she now expected, but his glance expressed quite a different sort of feeling : immense respect being the chief element in it. Two days later, Fidelia detained her after dinner—

‘Can you spare me a few minutes?’

‘Oh, as many as you like. I always leave Miss Felkin and Catford to settle the room for the night.’

‘We are very uneasy, Herbert and I, about Aunt Winter. Do you know she has made a new will?’

'I never thought of that! Was the dark man, whom I passed in the hall last Thursday, a lawyer?'

'Yes. Mr. Severn. He has been asking Herbert whether we see any sign of mental derangement.'

'None whatever. Her mind is as clear as possible. She insists that Clive is dead; but I believe the wish is father to the thought. She has forced herself to believe it.'

'My own impression!' said Fidelia, with the air of one who was devoutly thankful.

'What is the new will?' asked inexperienced Judith.

'Do you suppose Mr. Severn would repeat?' cried Fidelia. 'Why, of course not; he only questioned Herbert about a conviction he finds rooted in her mind, that Clive is dead. He asked if we have any positive proof that this conviction is sound. We have heard rumours again and again that Clive died five years ago. His own lawyer cannot trace him. Letters are lying at his bank now which he has never sent for.'

'He *must* be dead,' said Judith.

Fidelia looked doubtful.

'His affairs were in confusion, his investments had failed, his creditors were pressing. There were

no reasons why he should write, and a great many which made it better he should keep away.'

'But what will happen?' asked Judith. 'I don't think I understand.'

'You know she has absolute disposal of her fortune,' said Fidelia, in a low voice. 'Clive was only eighteen months old when his father died. Some of the money became his, as soon as he was twenty-one, but a very small portion of the whole. Unless Aunt Winter married a second time, she was given power to dispose of the rest as she liked.'

'Then what will she do with it?' asked Judith.

Fidelia turned pale, and, struck by a new idea, her cousin cried—'Oh, I see!'

'You must not say that,' said Fidelia. 'It would be improper. We have no right to imagine things. The question now relates to the state of her mind. When Mr. Severn told her Clive might be still living, she became very much hurt, and reminded him she had power to do as she pleased, and would take all responsibility upon herself.'

Judith stood still, with the appearance of thinking deeply. Not very long ago her aunt had said, quite suddenly, *à propos*, as it seemed, of nothing, 'What would you do if, one day, you were rather rich?' and she had answered quickly, 'Oh, I should bring Lu-

home.' Lady Winter had replied by saying, 'Tuts, tuts ;' but evidently the idea did not displease her, as she showed by making Judith a present of twenty pounds, and telling her to enclose it to Ludovic in her next letter. Another day some mention was made of Fidelia, and Judith said, 'She is very good, but we don't understand each other,' at which Lady Winter exclaimed, 'No, and you never will ; but I hope there may always be sisterly affection between you. I have taken care not to sow the dragon's teeth. You and she are made equal in every respect.'

These sayings, and others of a like nature, had passed over Judith at the time without leaving a deep impression. She thought her aunt only referred to presents of jewellery, but now, after hearing what Fidelia had to communicate, a new set of ideas rushed into her mind, causing tremendous tumult there.

' If you and I should ever inherit much money,' said Fidelia, gravely, ' it will be a terrible responsibility. Wealth is only given to hold in trust for others.'

' Are we not two of the people for whom we hold it in trust ?' asked Judith.

' I cannot be satisfied with that argument,' said

her cousin; ‘I never could. No; we ought to surrender *everything*, even ourselves.’

‘But I want so many things,’ said Judith, in a timid voice, ‘and not wicked things. You see I am not like you. I have had scarcely any pleasures.’

Whenever the thought that she might one day be rich passed through her mind, a flash of joy followed. She wished she did not feel so strangely excited.

‘I suppose I am tired,’ continued Fidelia, ‘for at this moment I feel a desperate desire to live like other people. Why is it, that I, alone among all those I know, am cursed with this impulse to struggle after Perfection?’

‘You do look shockingly tired,’ said Judith. ‘I wish you would rest.’

‘Oh, it will be bed-time in an hour; the clock struck nine, didn’t it?’

‘That’s always the way,’ cried Judith. ‘Herbert and you work till you are worn out, and can scarcely stand; then you crawl to bed, and begin the same weary round at six o’clock next morning. It is not right that human beings should live so; it is not natural.’

‘No, it is not natural,’ said Fidelia, ‘but we are sent here to conquer nature. Sometimes mortal

weakness feels tempted to give in. Lately, I have felt as if I must scream, so tremendous is the effort to repress self. I am always shivering, not with hunger or cold. If for one year I could let my instincts have their way—read books, see pictures, live in golden sunshine, and turn my eyes from poverty and vice and ugliness—how blessed it would be! But this is the wailing of a coward.'

She had risen from her seat, and was walking up and down the long room, twisting her hands together, while Judith, who had never imagined, till this moment, that such moods existed for the calm Fidelia, looked on in great anxiety.

'I used to think life very desolate,' she said, 'but it wasn't my own choice that made it so. I had not turned the key on myself though I *did* live in prison. And there was always Ludovic.'

'Your soul only admits of one idea,' said Fidelia, reproachfully.

'Well, he represented love,' said Judith; 'and, if love is in one's life, it is impossible to feel starved. Horribly cross, and jealous, and spiteful—yes—I have been all three; but when he came in, I wanted to keep things going somehow, for his sake, and he was such a dear, he was easily pleased. I polished his boots often, when we had a tiresome servant, or no servant

of any kind whatever ; he never found out. Once he said, "That girl of yours does boots exquisitely," and it was I ! He would have been angry if he had known. Of course I never let him know.'

' You polished his boots ? ' cried Fidelia. ' *You*, who are so dainty ? '

' I am not dainty when I love any one,' said Judith, pirouetting on one foot. ' It is love that makes the world go round. Of course it is ! '

Directly the words left her mouth she wished them recalled, for her cousin started as if a gun had been fired at her ear.

' You are right,' she said, ' it is love we need ; but not such love as yours, Judith.'

CHAPTER IX

LADY WINTER had two more interviews with Mr. Severn during the month of December, astonishing him by the clearness of her perceptions. Only on one point she obstinately refused to hear argument—Clive's name must never be mentioned among the living. ‘ You believe my son is alive,’ she said to the lawyer ; ‘ I have a conviction he is dead. But one fact is certain, and admits of no disputing : I have a right to do as I like with my own.’

On the tenth of February she had a paralytic seizure, and began to decline rapidly. Her life flickered like the flame of a dying candle in its socket ; sometimes seeming as strong as ever, sometimes sinking to such a condition of feebleness it could scarcely be recognised as life at all. Next she took cold, no one could imagine how ; a sharp attack of congestion of the lungs exhausted her strength, and, though remedies were effectual and she recovered, it was evident to all that the King of Terrors was now

fast approaching. The sadness of these days was increased to Judith by the presence of her Aunt Constance, who travelled post haste from Monte Carlo, directly she heard Lady Winter's illness was certain to prove fatal. Her hard eyes fastened on Judith with a look of aversion the very moment they saw each other.

' You never told me that girl was here ! ' she said to Fidelia ; who replied, ' Of course I thought you knew ! She has been very useful.'

Mrs. Stafford seemed determined to turn her niece's presence to good account, sending her on errands in a manner which Judith hotly resented, and treating her exactly as if she had been the typical ' poor relation.' Once she handed two letters over her shoulder saying, ' Take those to the post.' ' Yes,' replied Judith, ' I will, when you ask me to do so like a lady.' From that time there was open war between them.

One especial drop of bitterness to Judith lay in the fact that neither her Aunt Winter nor Fidelia took her part against Mrs. Stafford, as she considered they ought to have done. On the contrary, the invalid tried, in various small ways, to hide from her sister that Judith had become her chief friend on earth, always speaking to her with formality when Constance

happened to be present. Once she said, in a trembling voice, ‘Let Catford come now, dearest. I should like *her* best this evening.’ Judith felt amazed, but the next moment Mrs. Stafford’s voice was audible in the next room, and she knew the sensitive ears of the sick person must have caught the sound of approaching steps before any one else had been aware of them.

Judith’s heart was sorely wounded. She did not know, then, that extreme weakness makes dying people shrink even from the beginning of an argument. Lady Winter often shut her eyes when her sister came in, and feigned sleep in order to avoid conversation.

‘Keep her out of the room,’ she said several times; and Catford, Miss Felkin, and Judith all did their best, but were generally baffled by Mrs. Stafford’s persistent ingenuity. When, at last, she succeeded in forcing an entrance, they used to feel hurt because Lady Winter never defended their conduct in having tried to prevent her coming.

‘Aunt Winter used to be so different,’ Judith said to Miss Felkin. ‘I thought I had never seen any one so honest and brave. Very often she was imperious, but that didn’t signify. She liked showing Herbert Winter how fond she was of me. Does illness always change people in this way?’

'My dear, you must be patient,' replied Miss Felkin. 'Lady Winter needs every atom of her strength to die with; she has none left for discussion. Yes, illness always changes people; at least, mortal illness does. We must be prepared for it. Her heart is yours all the time. I see her eyes following you wistfully, but she dare not risk a scene with Mrs. Stafford.'

One afternoon in March, Judith went to the library, which Fidelia used as a parish work-room, in order to take a message. As she opened the door she heard Mrs. Stafford say, 'You will keep talking of that insufferable girl. What has she to do with Clive?' Judith went forward quickly, and her aunt, with a look of vexation, rose from her chair, slipping a thin foreign letter into her pocket meanwhile.

'I must talk to you another time, Fidelia,' she said, 'when we can get a moment to ourselves. We seem liable to these interruptions.'

Judith perceived that Mrs. Stafford was crosser than usual. She felt certain that her temper must have been roused by the foreign letter, so hastily concealed, and also that those mysterious words, 'What has she to do with Clive?' were spoken in the same connection. Her clever wits put two and two together, and, shooting an arrow at a venture, with the hope of

causing annoyance, she asked coolly, ‘ Is it possible that you have just received news of Clive ? ’

Fidelia became the colour of paper. Mrs. Stafford cleared her throat twice before answering. If disdain could have crushed Judith, she must have fallen, ground to powder, at her feet.

‘ I think family matters had better be left to ourselves,’ she said. ‘ But I will satisfy your curiosity so far—this letter is *not* from Clive.’

‘ What does all this mean ? ’ asked Judith, directly the door had closed behind her aunt. ‘ You never, by any chance, deceive. Tell me, Fidelia, has any news come from Clive ? ’

‘ You must be told everything now,’ said Fidelia, sadly. ‘ Your own ill-regulated temper has brought this trouble upon you. The letter was not from him, but it tells us he is living. Colonel Stafford has seen a man at Monte Carlo, who spoke to him six weeks ago in Texas.’

Judith sprang a few paces backwards, like a child who, having thrown down a squib, is terrified at the result of its own action. In a second she realised what Clive’s return might mean for herself.

‘ You must not tell Aunt Winter suddenly,’ interposed Fidelia. ‘ There is a great deal to think about first.’

'But he is alive,' said Judith, unable to take in more than one idea.

'He has changed his name,' said her cousin. 'He calls himself Wentworth. We discover, now, that he made a miserable marriage nine and a half years ago. His wife is intemperate. He deserted her, but he is afraid to come home lest she should find him out and cause scandal.'

'How are we to tell Aunt Winter?'

'Ah! There's the point.'

'But she must be told?'

Fidelia made no answer, only looked at Judith with her strange eyes.

'Do you mean that you——?'

'We are beginning to think it may be our duty to keep back this news. It cannot bring real consolation, and yet it will mean——'

At this point Fidelia suddenly stopped. Judith's head turned round and round. She thought she heard a voice saying, '*It means a fortune lost.*' . . .

'We must tell her,' she cried, and her own voice sounded strange in her ears.

'Let us set things in order before our minds,' said Fidelia. 'This matter does not concern ourselves alone; if it did, our course would be clear. It will affect the welfare of children yet unborn.'

Perhaps—who can say?—it may be our duty to let Aunt Winter die in ignorance of the truth. By some strange intervention of Providence, an idea has taken root in her mind, which has given her comfort and caused her to do what, in the interest of others, she should have done long before. It cannot be the will of God that such wealth as hers should be left at the disposal of an utterly unprincipled man.'

'He may have improved since you knew him?'

'The accounts we had to-day show very clearly that he is just what he always was. No experiences change Clive. From the very first he had an affection for low company; it used to seem incomprehensible in his mother's son.'

'But I don't understand; how has he lived all this time?'

'Oh, he has ways and means. He knew that if he came back his wife would trace him, and the scenes with his mother would be intolerable. He knows exactly how things stand. There must be some one in England who keeps him informed as to the condition of her health, and the people who come to the house. My mother imagines it is one of the servants. If so, he may hear any day of Mr. Severn's visits, and then, I feel sure, he will write.'

'How strange he has not written before!' said Judith. 'It is all so puzzling to me.'

'He never dreamt that his mother would alter her will,' said Fidelia. 'Neither would she have done so, but for this delusion that he is dead. Oh, how I wish you had not forced yourself into the secret! I could have charged my conscience with the decision—I, with Herbert to counsel me—and you need never have been burdened. This matter is too difficult for you; it involves great risks. We must do what will help on the cause of righteousness, and try to forget everything which might hold us back.'

'All this bewilders me,' cried Judith. 'I can't understand! If it is really a servant who writes to him, he may be frightened, and come any moment.'

'That is true,' said Fidelia, 'in which case we shall have nothing to decide. But meantime——'

'Meantime,' thought Judith, and remembered the life which was ebbing so fast away.

'I want to act without thinking about myself,' continued Fidelia: 'selfish thoughts mislead.'

'Oh, don't talk like that!' exclaimed Judith. 'Say we keep the truth hidden because we want so dreadfully to have the money. Don't say God wants us to do it, because He doesn't; of course He doesn't.'

If He did, He would be as dishonest as we are—you and I.'

' You never grasp ideas, Judith,' said Fidelia.
' You believe in nothing.'

' I believe it is better to do right than wrong,' said Judith. ' That's all I ever did or could believe. If we hide the truth now we shall have done wickedness, and some day we shall be judged for it. I think I sha'n't care—at all events, I shall have had my life; the rest doesn't signify.'

' You don't mean what you say,' replied Fidelia.
' It would be too shocking if you did. We must not rely for guidance on our own undisciplined natures; we must listen to direction—Herbert can advise us both.'

' If you really and truly believe in direction,' said Judith; ' do you know where to get it? Mr. Rainthorpe is a clergyman, and much older and wiser than Herbert. Go to him with this story, and see what he says.'

' Impossible! We are not in sympathy.'

' Is he too honest? I saw him this morning. He looks good, not strong, perhaps, but good. I seem to know what sort of direction his would be.'

' I think it is a pity to bring in another person,' said Fidelia; ' but God forbid that I should hinder any

soul from seeking help. Go to Mr. Rainthorpe, if you wish, only——'

'Do you really suppose I was serious?' cried Judith. 'Why, I know already what I ought to do; and to-morrow I will do it—perhaps to-night. When I go back I will say, "Clive is in America; we have heard from some one who spoke to him six weeks ago." The truth may break her heart; but truth belongs to God, and He must take the responsibility.'

'Are you so sure?' said Fidelia. 'This particular truth seems as if it owed its existence to the devil. I don't mean the fact of poor Clive being still in the world; I mean that he should still—after years of probation—remain as incurably selfish as at first.'

'Then I am lost in confusion,' said Judith, 'and don't feel certain of anything at all. I only know that I am wrapped up in flames!'

'Let me set things before you again,' said Fidelia. 'Clive is an unprincipled man; of that there can be no doubt. And he is a cruel one. He has let his mother live in burning anxiety for years, when a word from him would have allayed it. There may have been reasons why the world should suppose him dead, and leave off looking for him; but no reasons could apply to her. She would have kept his secret. Now he will return to claim her money. And she is weak

with illness. She will put it all without reserve into his hands. Think of the misery to our poor people ! Riverscourt is safe with Denis. But we have Deepdell to consider. You know nothing of our work there. It is a miserable place—no church, no school, fit to be called such ; cottages where human beings ought not to live. We have been making plans for the future, thinking of the multitude of things we could do. Now, in a moment, all is changed. Oh, it is a sinful law which makes over so many souls into the power of one human being, let his character be what it may. And this misfortune we can prevent by keeping silence.'

'And we shall be rich,' said Judith. 'Does Mrs. Stafford know that Aunt Winter means to leave me equal with you ? No, I am sure she does not. How angry she will be ! The girl she scorned, an heiress like her own daughter. Money is worth everything else in the world. Why ? Because it brings them all in its train—Love—Joy—Happiness ; how strange they should follow gold sovereigns !'

Fidelia shuddered. She did not like her cousin in these wild moods. A creature of law herself, such ungovernable impulses offended her sense of decency.

'I should be good if I had money,' said Judith. 'The virtuous woman in Proverbs would be nothing

to me. Only I shouldn't be prudent, as good people usually are. I should be very kind to every one, and shower presents upon them. I should help Aubrey—dear Aubrey! Perhaps I might even marry him when I was rich. And Lu—I should give him—I should send——'

But here, to Fidelia's amazement, she checked herself, and turned pale.

'I should send for Lu, did I say? Yes, of course. And if he refused to come?'

'You are not well, Judith,' said her cousin; 'the shock has been too much for you.'

'Oh, I am well,' said Judith, speaking now in a wholly altered voice, and letting her words drag like a sleep-walker's. 'Only I wish we could see each other, just for half an hour; that I might ask his advice. But I know beforehand what he would say: "*Don't do it, Judy; all the money in the world is not worth a sin.*" "But it is to bring you home, Lu; it is to bring you home." Oh, what will become of me!'

She hid her face in her hands and burst into an agony of tears. Fidelia went to the window and gazed absently at the leafless trees and lawn slightly sugared with snow.

'I wish I had never heard of the money,' continued Judith. 'I wish the idea of being rich had never come into my head. It has stayed there, all

these weary days and nights, when every one said I was so wonderfully kind. And I *was* kind—I meant to be kind. I have felt so sorry for her, because she was alone and in pain, and her money could not do anything more for her. Have I been half a devil all this time, when I seemed so good? Oh, help me! Do help me!'

The cry for help was addressed to no one in particular. It was wrung from her lips by extremity of anguish.

'Try to forget the money,' said Fidelia, gently. 'Perpetual dwelling upon personal motives has a tendency to darken the judgment. Think of the great issues which are involved in the matter; think of the poor creatures in Deepdell; think of the power for evil which a single word from us may place in the hands of Clive. I don't want you to be persuaded against your conscience. I only want to help you into the right path.'

Judith did not hear. She had flung herself on the floor, and was pressing her head against the window seat. The battle was very unequal. On one side crowds of hidden impulses, laws of life which she had never disputed, motives which had swayed her actions ever since she could remember. On the other, only a dread of displeasing Ludovic. And the money would bring him home.

CHAPTER X

THE cousins met next morning at nine o'clock, having each passed a sleepless night. They were always alone at this hour, Mrs. Stafford breakfasting in her own room by preference. Judith ate nothing, and pushed away her home letters unopened. It was evident the secret was still on her heart. Fidelia, who had been to church, looked even more deathly than usual. The pretence of a meal ended, they stood for a few minutes in silence on the hearth-rug ; then Judith turned round, with questioning eyes.

‘I have talked to Herbert,’ said Fidelia. ‘I laid the whole case before him, and his advice is to wait a few days. If our information is true we shall hear from Clive himself before long. It would be cruel, in Aunt Winter’s present state, to tell her suddenly that he is alive and has not written. She consoles herself by imagining he is dead. When he writes or sends a message it will be time enough to tell her ; our duty will then be clear. Let us wait five or six days.’

‘ And perhaps before then—— ’

‘ We are in God’s hands,’ said Fidelia.

Judith turned impatiently aside.

‘ Do you know what all this means ? Herbert and you are a couple of cowards, letting “ I dare not ” wait upon “ I would.” That is the sum of the whole matter.’

The day dragged on. About five o’clock Judith went down the drive to meet the postman, who sometimes at this hour brought letters from abroad. Her hope was not disappointed. He gave her a thin, foreign envelope, but when she looked at the writing terrible fear seized her, for it was not Ludovic’s. She tore the cover open, shaking from head to foot. Happily the first words were reassuring as to her brother’s safety. The letter did not come from Buenos Ayres at all.

‘ DEAR MISS HERMANN,—I hope that, before now, you have heard of the existence of your cousin Clive. He has heard of you, and is glad to have an opportunity of thanking you for all the kindness you have shown at Riverscourt. A circumstance, which I will not enter into, has made it impossible for me to come home. This will soon be changed. Meanwhile I shall be gratified if you will give my mother the

letter I enclose. If, by evil chance, it arrives too late, burn immediately, unopened. There are reasons why I judge it best to address her through you ; but these will keep until we see each other. I hope Mrs. Stafford stays at a safe distance, and that my sweet cousin, Fidelia, is occupied with the poor. The less you see of either of them the better. If they describe me as a stage devil, with horns and a tail, you can believe half ; if Herbert and Fidelia are as intimate as they used to be, take care to act with discretion. Separately they can be despised ; together they become dangerous. The partnership of a Knave and a Fool has perils for honest men.

‘ CLIVE WINTER.’

Judith read this letter by the waning light of the afternoon, cold chills of disappointment making her heart beat more slowly than usual as she did so. They had now no shadow of excuse for doubting Clive’s existence. He was alive, and would soon be with them. She was too restless and ill at ease to think in the open air. The least movement among the leaves proved harassing, and the flowers of the laurestinus seemed to look at her like the faces of forsaken outraged friends. They were favourites of Aubrey’s. The Christmas before leaving for Paris he

had painted some on a card, and sent them to her, with a few lines of his own composing. Aubrey's verse was not equal to his draughtsmanship, but served for Christmas cards. Judith fled from the laurestinus, and the pale cold blue of the March sky, into the vast empty dining-room.

That morning, in spite of all her indignant words, she had felt glad to be urged to wait. Waiting meant time gained. Now Herbert and Fidelia (cowards as she called them in her heart) would never have courage to keep up their policy of silence. They would read that letter with white, set lips, and give up all they hoped for in abject submission. Had not Fidelia said, 'Our duty will then be clear ?'

'Not a bit clearer than it was yesterday,' thought Judith. 'We knew Clive was living then. There's nothing in the letter to comfort his mother; but they will say it makes all the difference. They wish what they have not courage to do.'

Then she checked herself, and glanced round the room, for, inadvertently, some of her thoughts had been uttered half aloud.

'Where are you, Judith?' asked Fidelia's voice. 'Oh, in the dark! I have been searching in your room, in the garden, in all sorts of places. I never supposed you were here.'

Suddenly, as she came in, Judith crushed a piece of paper and hid it in her dress.

'Aunt Winter has been asking for you,' said her cousin. 'She seems unusually well this evening.'

* * * *

'Where have you lingered, Judith?' said the weak voice, anxiously. 'I sent half an hour ago. Some one has changed the position of the furniture without my knowledge—the sofa stands against the opposite wall.'

'We did that some time since; it is more convenient there.'

'But I don't like changes I have not been asked about, and now I want to have the black cabinet opened. You will find a few of my mother's letters in it, tied up with green. Take them out and burn them while I watch you.'

Judith did as she was desired, and then came to the side of the bed. This sudden display of vitality in the invalid filled her with astonishment.

'Is there anything else I can do for you?' she asked.

'No; not just now. Sit here and talk a little while. It is strange how my mind runs on the past this evening—the far-off past—about which I don't often think; my mother uppermost all the time.'

How odd, if an old woman like me, on the edge of the grave, began crying for her mother ! Yet I never needed her as much as I do now.'

' You were only sixteen when she left you,' said Judith ; whose quick tact told her that Lady Winter wished for an excuse to talk about the subject of which her thoughts were full.

' Yes ; barely sixteen. People said I was heartless then ; but, if so, I made up for it afterwards. I missed her when I married, and when my boy was born, and when my husband died, and every day of my life since. I miss her now, though I dare say you think I am foolish to talk in this way.'

' No, dear ; I understand.'

' Did any one call this afternoon ? '

' Only Herbert.'

' I had an idea, in the course of the afternoon, that the house was crowded with people—just a sick person's dreams, I suppose. I imagined I heard footsteps moving about, and carriages driving up, and once I could have felt sure that some important discussion was going on ; the air seemed heavy with great matters. These are strange fancies—why do you sigh so often, Judith ? '

' Did I sigh ? '

' Yes, most wearily.'

'I was thinking, and my thoughts made me sad.'

'Tell me what they were. I feel able to listen and talk so well this evening.'

Judith turned pale. If she said 'Clive has written,' what would happen then? Would she be glad or sorry, this dying woman, whose eyes were turned so hopefully towards the invisible world, where she trusted to see her son? Perhaps sorry. Then, in a little while, she would send for Mr. Severn, and tear up the document which made no mention of Clive. This very evening it could be done.

From the hall, where Fidelia was practising Gregorian music, the deep swelling notes of the organ floated up to them, and, after a few minutes, the sound disturbed Lady Winter.

'I don't like those melancholy chants,' she said. 'Ask her to leave off playing. No; let Catford take the message. I want you to stay with me. By-and-bye I should like to hear the Lord's Prayer, and then, perhaps, you will bid me good night—only, look in again, just before you lie down.'

They sat in silence, until Lady Winter put out her hand and gently touched Judith, who knew an ordeal lay in front of her. Somehow or other she must force herself to repeat the words of the Lord's

Prayer. There was no use hesitating ; it simply had to be done.

‘Why do you wait ?’ asked her aunt. ‘I only asked for the Lord’s Prayer. You understood me, didn’t you ?’

‘Yes, I understood. I will try.’

Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. It was extraordinary. Nervousness must quite have paralysed her faculties. Yet, when she rose and exclaimed in despair, ‘I will ask Fidelia to come,’ her voice was natural enough.

‘Did you ask for me ?’ said Fidelia, who came in at that moment.

‘Yes, Aunt Winter wished for the Lord’s Prayer. I can’t remember it.’

Without a sign of surprise, Fidelia knelt down and repeated the prayer. Judith felt as if she had never heard it before, so intense was the light now flashed upon its meaning. When her cousin said, in the conventional voice appropriate to such occasions, ‘Deliver us from evil,’ she with difficulty suppressed a faint shriek. Yet, at the end, she dared not say ‘Amen.’

‘I am sure you are still very unhappy,’ whispered Fidelia, on bidding her good-night, in the passage outside their rooms. ‘Would it not be of use to see Herbert?’

‘I tell you I hate him, and I hate you, and I hate myself,’ cried Judith. ‘No; I shall not see him.’

‘If you could repeat the prayer we have just said five or six times,’ urged Fidelia.

‘Would not once be enough?’ said Judith, as she closed the door of her room.

When Fidelia came back from early church next morning her fears were excited by seeing signs of trouble among the servants. They told her their mistress had been suddenly taken ill, and a messenger had gone for the doctor.

‘Is it another seizure?’ she asked.

But no answer appeared forthcoming, so, with some timidity, she went upstairs and ventured into the sick-room. Judith, who was kneeling beside the bed, turned round quickly, raising her hand with a gesture which commanded silence. Her awe-struck expression stayed in her cousin’s memory, never to be forgotten. Mrs. Stafford soon came hurrying in, Miss Felkin and Catford were already there, and before long the doctor also joined them. But the hand of the dying woman lay in Judith’s. To her she had turned her face in the first shock of sudden calamity, half an hour before, and towards her she continued to look, blindly, when the light of the eyes

was already darkened. It seemed as if the room contained only those two.

Gradually the breathing became faint. There was a pause, one sobbing sigh, and then profound stillness. Fidelia knew the end had come when she saw Judith's head fall forwards on the pillow.

CHAPTER XI

LADY WINTER was laid to rest in Riverscourt Church-yard, one bleak March morning. Numbers of duties fell to Fidelia's share, as Judith shut herself up in her room, refusing to come out or see any of the family. She knew that General Winter, her uncle Colin's last remaining brother, an old man of seventy-five, had joined the circle. Colonel Stafford was also in the house, and another relation, younger and more sprightly than either of these, Lancelot Wood, the son of Sir Colin's sister, an author of notoriety. The will was an immense subject of interest, but also of cutting disappointment. Herbert and Lancelot received five thousand each; Mrs. Stafford, two thousand, with some valuable lace and a Dresden china dinner service. Six thousand went in gifts to hospitals and in small legacies, and the rest was divided between Fidelia Beresford and Judith Hermann, burdened only with the necessity of paying an annuity of a hundred guineas to Miss

Felkin. The Staffords were loud in their wail when they heard what a meagre portion had been assigned them.

‘Only two thousand !’ said the Colonel. ‘Why, it is less than the companion has. And those two girls going off with a hundred thousand between them. I never heard of a more scandalous arrangement.’

‘Rose must have lost her self-control,’ said his wife, ‘and all her powers of judgment. The Hermann girl completely mastered her. To think of such an underbred, common creature being equal with my daughter ! Why, wealth to her will be only a misfortune.’

‘And we could have done so much with it,’ said Lancelot, completing the sentence in an undertone.

‘Yes,’ said General Winter, who overheard him, ‘the Staffords show very bad taste. At the same time, I confess I don’t understand things ; in fact, I may as well own, I fail to grasp their meaning altogether. There’s no mention of me in the will from first to last. One likes to be remembered at these times. I don’t need money, thank God ; but a book, or a picture, or a piece of plate just some trifle—to show I was not forgotten. It was a singular oversight of my sister-in-law’s.’

'I suppose you have left her some important keepsakes,' remarked Lancelot.

'No, I have not,' said the General. 'The idea never once occurred to me. She didn't often write, or remind me of her existence, and she had every mortal thing she could possibly need, five times over. Why should I leave her anything?'

'Oh, no reason at all,' said Lancelot.

'I take your meaning, Sir,' replied his uncle. 'When there is anything *you* can teach me it seems as if the time had come for me to quit the world. One would like to do so with some shred of dignity. And now, instead of discussing trivialities, it would be better if we thought of Clive. Rumour says he died five years ago, but positive proof has never been forthcoming. If he is alive there will be trouble here before long. He won't sit down quietly under a blow like this.'

'He must be dead,' said Lancelot.

'How do you know that? His wife believes him to be still alive. She had the audacity to write me a begging letter. It seems he made over to her a sum of money five years ago, on condition of being unmolested. She has lately left England and gone to relations of hers in Guernsey. Clive stayed abroad to avoid her. This news may bring him home.'

‘I shall go soon,’ observed Lancelot, uneasily. ‘No reason whatever to keep me. Only I want to see Miss Hermann. People say she is handsome; a red-haired beauty. I dote on red hair! Where in the world is she?’

The question had been asked many times before Judith made her appearance. It was not until the morning of the Staffords’ leave-taking, when their boxes were already in the hall, and they themselves were standing equipped for the journey, that she came slowly downstairs and walked into the library. Herbert and Fidelia were amazed at the alteration which had taken place in her appearance during the last ten days. They felt as if they suddenly realised her beauty for the first time, and those in the room, who had never seen her before, received a positive shock of surprise. Her cheeks had lost their roundness, but this only seemed to bring out more distinctly the fine moulding of her features and the beautiful curving line from ear to chin. Her eyes looked larger, her expression was hard, almost defiant, and she bent her head, in answer to greetings, as if she were a Queen and every one else a subject, who must keep the distance prescribed.

‘Why, she’s the most beautiful woman in the world,’ whispered the impressionable Lancelot, all in

a flutter and a fuss. ‘There is positively nothing to wish different. What a complexion! What wonderful eyes! And her hair! How do the lines go?

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit pure.

But she doesn’t look spiritual. I shouldn’t wonder if she had a devil of a temper. You never told me to expect anything so marvellous.’

‘I never saw her before,’ said Herbert.

His words were almost literally true. He always looked at women’s faces as little as possible, and his first glance at Judith had failed to impress him. It was difficult to believe that this pale, proud creature was the ignorant unsophisticated girl whom Fidelia and he had discussed, criticised, and now and then condescendingly approved. Meanwhile Fidelia shrank from her cousin, with feelings which bordered on terror. All the tales she had heard of possession by evil spirits and demoniac agency flew to her mind, refusing to be driven away. This was not the Judith whom she had known, but another.

The Staffords disappeared, followed shortly by Lancelot. General Winter remained, and was useful in reading letters, telling Fidelia the initials of cousins for whom presents were designed, and also in helping

Herbert, who was sole executor. Judith stayed a great deal in her own room, and on those rare occasions when she did come downstairs remained obstinately silent. A fortnight had passed in this way, enlivened only by visits from Denis, when the peace of the household was suddenly disturbed.

One evening, after dinner, the entire family collected in the drawing-room. The General fell asleep in his easy chair, Herbert and Fidelia discussed parish matters in low voices, while Lancelot, who had invented some plausible reason for coming down to Riverscourt, from Saturday till Monday, to look at Judith, was trying to make her look at him; no easy matter. She had lately developed a passion for needlework, which served her in good stead this evening, as it enabled her to bend over an embroidery frame and avert her eyes from his face.

All at once a noise of arrival was heard outside, wheels grating on the gravel, and a bell loudly rung. The General started up in his chair, saying, ‘Who’s that? Who’s that? Some one for me?’ Herbert and Fidelia checked their conversation, Judith let her heavy frame slip to the floor. Five minutes afterwards the butler threw open the door, announcing ‘Mr. Clive Winter.’

‘Clive,’ repeated his uncle, uncertain if he were

awake or still dreaming. ‘God bless my soul! Is it Clive?’

‘Clive!’ echoed Herbert, making two steps forward. ‘When did you reach England? Why haven’t you written? You take us by surprise.’

‘So it seems,’ said Clive. ‘I might be the ghost you hoped I was, you all look so terrified. Cheer up, Uncle Roderick. Where is Fidelia hiding? Is this the only welcome you have for me?’

‘We are glad to see you,’ said Herbert. ‘Come to the fire and let me help you to take off your coat. The wind is keen, but it is warm indoors.’

Judith, who remained at the other end of the room, saw that her cousin was a strongly built man, above the medium height, with dark brown hair, very thick and disposed to curl, a complexion much tanned by the sun, and restless, uneasy eyes. Judging from their expression alone most people would have supposed he had just done something to be ashamed of, but, oddly enough, his mouth, which was delicate and refined, seemed determined to give his eyes the lie, and tell another history.

‘Your cousin, Judith,’ said Herbert, trying to be master of the ceremonies.

Clive bent his head, with a furtive glance in her direction.

'Take this chair,' continued Herbert, putting one out officially.

'Don't excite yourself,' said Clive, patting him on the shoulder. 'I can attend to my own comfort. You are getting middle-aged, Herbert. You fuss more than is seemly. There—— sit down.'

He pushed his cousin into the chair destined for himself, and remained standing.

'When did you reach England?' asked General Winter.

'Yesterday. I waited in London twenty-four hours, because I had the child with me. He can't travel fast.'

'You have a child?'

'Yes; he is here now. I gave him to one of the maids. I couldn't leave him behind in an hotel.'

'God bless my soul,' repeated the General.

'Now,' continued Clive, his face darkening, 'I want some questions answered. I know already that I have come too late.'

'Ten years too late,' said Fidelia's quiet voice.

'I sent a letter before me,' he went on, paying her no attention—'a letter to Miss Hermann, enclosing one for my mother.'

Judith had been waiting for this moment, already, as it seemed, half a lifetime.

‘ You did ; I received the letters.’

‘ And you gave one to my mother ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ She never saw it ? Am I to understand that you kept back the letter ? ’

Every one waited. Herbert and Fidelia—who heard of this correspondence for the first time—looked alarmed. General Winter stared, beneath his heavy white eyebrows, at Judith’s face. She hesitated scarcely an instant, then said, in a distinct voice, ‘ It came too late.’

‘ You never mentioned this,’ said Fidelia. ‘ I heard of no letter—did it come that last morning ? ’

She had a distinct recollection of coming downstairs a few minutes after her aunt’s spirit had passed away, and seeing the letters lying in a heap on the sideboard, instead of being placed beside her own plate and Judith’s on the breakfast table. Her cousin had instantly seized and divided them. The circumstance seemed very natural at the time, as the servants were all preoccupied. Death breaks every rule, and throws the most conventional household into temporary disarrangement.

‘ Did the letter come while my aunt was actually dying ? ’ asked Herbert. ‘ That was strangely sad.

She died at half-past eight in the morning, Clive, just after the early celebration.'

'I am waiting for my cousin's answer,' observed Clive.

'Yes,' said Judith, 'it happened in that way.'

For a second the room seemed to turn round. Her sense of shame was so overpowering she wondered it did not reveal itself in her countenance, and proclaim her a liar before them all. That stage in evil had been reached when it becomes well-nigh impossible to turn back. How could she confess that the letter had been in the house fifteen hours before her aunt died? What would they say? What would they think? Easier to go on deceiving for ever than to tell the truth now.

Yet there were heavy risks involved in keeping silence. An inquiry at the village post-office might elicit facts. She remembered, with relief, that foreign letters came too often for her to excite comment, and most likely no one had observed the mark. If the worst should come to the worst, it would only be the word of the letter-carrier against her own.

Clive turned his face to the fire and digested this information as best he might.

'I was too long in writing,' he said at last. 'But each day I hoped to be able to start myself. Things

have gone badly with me. I came directly I was free.'

'It has all been unfortunate,' said his uncle; 'most unfortunate. My poor boy, you have painful news to hear.'

Clive shot another of his sidelong glances. He rarely looked any one straight in the face.

'I have heard the news already, I was told in London. And Severn drove up with me from the station just now. I wired to him to meet me.'

'I may as well say at once,' said Herbert, 'that I don't intend to profit by this will. The whole of my five thousand is yours, my dear Clive—on one condition only—which need not be spoken of at this moment.'

'Bravo, Herbert!' said his cousin. 'You are not changed, I see; just the same conscientious fool you always were. Thank you; I will take those five thousand pounds.'

'On one condition,' repeated Herbert.

'Oh, hang conditions!' said Clive. 'Now, to the kernel of the matter. Do you people—knaves and fools included—all think seriously that I am going to rest content and leave things as they are?'

'I am afraid,' said General Winter, 'that you will be obliged to leave things as they are. I say

afraid, because, from my heart, I am sorry for you, and I hope some amicable arrangement may be come to. But the case, as it stands, admits of no disputing. Your mother was of sound mind when she made her will. Severn and the Doctor both testify to that. The only circumstance which looks strange is the fact that she asserted positively you were dead. But after ten years' silence she was justified in forming that opinion, and many reports——'

'Ten years' silence?' interrupted Clive. 'Oh, don't exaggerate my sins! I wrote to my mother twice during that time. Once, I admit, the letter was given to a very shady character to post (I couldn't help myself; I was ill just then), and he very likely forgot all about his duties. Perhaps he stole the money I gave for the stamps. In any case, I believe the letter was lost. But the second time I had an answer.'

'An answer?' exclaimed Fidelia.

'From your mother, my sweet cousin,' replied Clive. 'You know probably what sort of answer it would be. She said she was deputed to write, as her sister was too ill to do so herself. The post-mark was Naples.'

'It is true that Aunt Winter had a terrible illness at Naples, two and a half years ago,' said

Fidelia. ‘Her life hung on a thread, and the physicians dreaded agitation of any sort whatever.’

‘Exactly,’ said Clive. ‘But I should like to suppose my letter had reached her, for I believe I was more affectionate than usual when I wrote it. Some of the facts it contained no doubt were distressing, and at first I thought she was too much offended with them to care to answer. I waited weeks and weeks, but no notice was taken of me or my misfortunes. So it came to pass that, the next time I wrote, I directed the envelope not to herself, who might be in the hands of unprincipled persons, but to Miss Hermann, of whom report spoke honourably.’

A terrible silence followed these disclosures. Fidelia sat with her eyes on the ground. Herbert and his uncle tried to look at the opposite wall. Judith sickened and turned faint; she was not alone in her transgression. Some one shared the guilt with her, and that some one was the person she detested more than any other. Mrs. Stafford and she were henceforth linked by a horrible bond.

‘It may be true,’ continued Clive, ‘that I shall lose my case, if I dispute the will. But I warn you all, that I am resolved to fight. At least, I shall have the satisfaction of showing you up in your true

colours. When this fancy that I was dead caught hold of my mother, did any of you send out to search for proofs ? The evidence of my existence was not far to seek, if you had honestly looked ; it lay very near your own door. One of my letters was suppressed—who knows if the second one were not also ? ’

‘ That’s an insinuation you have no right to make,’ said Herbert, quickly.

‘ No one has accused you, my good boy,’ said Clive. ‘ We know who is the leading spirit here.’

Fidelia rose and came across the room, looking more livid than usual.

‘ I have borne with a great many insults,’ she said. ‘ I can bear no more. It was my purpose to recompense you for the disappointment you have suffered. Your insolence makes this impossible. Were I now to give up part of my legacy the world could only say that I did so to escape investigation. Understand, then, that I mean to keep the money your mother has left me, and I challenge you to prove that I have acted dishonourably.’

‘ Good,’ pronounced Clive. ‘ What does Miss Hermann say ? Is *she* anxious to court inquiry ? ’

His sarcastic tone brought the blood into Judith’s face.

‘I have nothing to be ashamed of,’ she said, with distinct emphasis.

After that she knew the path of retreat was closed, and that her steps went straight in the direction of infamy. As Clive looked towards her his eyes caught side of Wood, and he broke immediately into a wild laugh.

‘What, *you* there!’ he exclaimed. ‘You don’t usually lie as low as you have done this evening. No need to be chicken-hearted. You are the only person to whom I don’t grudge some of my father’s money ; you need it so desperately. There, come out and speak for yourself. Don’t hide like a rabbit behind the piano. Look at him, Uncle Roderick. These saints have hoodle-doodled me out of my inheritance, because they think I am a fiend incarnate, and the result is that Lancelot, whose record I would blush to own, has gone off with a slice. Don’t be alarmed, Lancelot ; I won’t tell tales. Besides, they wouldn’t believe me. Haven’t you published a volume of Poems in praise of the Virgin ? That’s enough to whitewash the devil’s reputation here. Only I had rather have my conscience than yours—many thousand times rather.’

General Winter rose from the chair in which he had been sitting, and laid his hand on Clive’s arm.

'This altercation had better cease,' he said. 'It becomes ignoble. My counsel, Clive, is to take Herbert's offer (which is just and generous, and what I should have expected from him), and let the past sleep. You have a son, who will live, I hope, to cherish his father's name. Don't let him grow up under the shadow of a great scandal. If you come before the public with your wrongs, you must be prepared for the story of your life being dragged into the light of day; unless I greatly mistake, there are persons living who will take care it is so dragged. For the sake of your child rest contented at present, and when my will comes to be opened you will find I have not forgotten you.'

Clive's face changed. Those who looked saw a heavy cloud steal over it. Perhaps he had been acting a part up to this moment, secretly conscious that he dare not press his claim, yet willing to deceive his cousins if, by so doing, he could frighten them into surrender. Perhaps the facts Severn had told him required time to be fully grasped, and the General's words suddenly brought their meaning home. What he meant to say in reply no one ever knew, for a child's voice was heard in the hall, and a curious halting step, not like a child's. Then the door was opened, and a little boy, about six years old,

with a pale olive-coloured face and large black eyes, came in.

'Father,' he said, 'we are too late, you and I. We ought to have come a great many years ago.'

The tones in which he spoke had a rich penetrating sweetness, quite peculiar, and not easily forgotten.

'You are right,' said Clive. 'You are always right, Rosny.'

'Because Tip is dead,' the child went on. 'Poor Tip! He died one hard winter, and is buried beneath an ash-tree in the woods. I shall never see Tip. Isn't that a pity, Father?'

'Yes, I am sorry. I should like to have shown you Tip. But there are other dogs in the world for you to play with.'

'Not one whom I know so well,' replied Rosny.

He had reached his father by this time, and, holding him tightly, turned round to look at the new relations.

'Come and talk to me,' said Herbert, stretching out his hand. 'I can tell you stories of Tip and Coco, the New Forest pony. Is he a friend of yours too?'

Rosny shook his head, quite declining the invitation.

'The poor child is tired,' said Fidelia. 'Come with me, little man, and I will see about some supper for you.'

But he shook his head again, and they saw tears beginning to gather.

'The journey was too much,' suggested Herbert.

'He always knows what to do,' said Clive, and, as if to bring out the hidden point of his words, Rosny, who had caught sight of General Winter, suddenly went forward, and laid one hand gently on his knee.

'You have a very intelligent little son, Clive,' said the old man; 'but what is this? Has he hurt himself? He walks as if he were lame.'

'It is nothing,' exclaimed Clive, 'nothing at all, I assure you. The muscles on one side are weak, for the present. But when he is older they will come right. You are not always going to be lame, are you, Rosny?'

He stooped over him while saying this, and kissed his cheek a great many times. Herbert and Lancelot both came to the conclusion that Rosny's mother was not the wife on whose account Clive had avoided his native land for so many years. They also thought it probable that she was Spanish or Portuguese: the child's appearance suggesting a mixture of foreign blood. General Winter may have

known more than either of them, but his expression was very friendly as he looked into the great tired eyes of the little traveller.

'He is well grown,' continued Clive, 'and not too slender for his age—five and a half.'

'Six in four days,' said Rosny.

'Well, six, then. But his colour is good, and, in short, I am not uneasy about him. He was a delicate baby, and did not do much till he had begun his third year. Now he makes up for lost time.'

Every one present, except General Winter, was too deeply engrossed with personal matters to observe the tone of bitter anxiety with which Clive defended his little boy.

'You should be careful,' said the General: 'long journeys are not good for such young brains. Get him to bed as quickly as you can.'

'I am not sleepy,' cried Rosny, 'bed is a dull place; let me stay here. I want to know about the bullets.'

He lowered his voice to a whisper in saying the last words.

'What bullets?'

'Father said when you came home from India you had five bullets inside you, and they took them all out except one.'

'That's true; and if your father can tell me exactly where the last one is I shall be very much obliged to him.'

'I mean to be a soldier,' said Rosny, still speaking in a whisper. 'All my friends are soldiers. I mean the fancy friends I talk to when I talk to myself. One of them is more than a hundred years old, the youngest is sixty. They have fought a great many battles, and have bullets inside them, and stars on their coats. I know their names and their faces, and—'

'Why don't you have young friends,' asked the General, 'as young as yourself?'

'I like them to be old. If they were young they couldn't have fought so many battles. I am old too, when I talk to them; I am always old when I dream. And talking to fancy friends is the same almost as dreaming, isn't it?'

Rosny held General Winter by his coat and looked eagerly at him, as if fearing he might vanish into air. The sight of a grey-haired soldier, alive and breathing, was a marvel evidently too great to be believed.

'The child dreams waking and sleeping,' said Clive. 'And yet I don't think he will be a soldier, for all this talk. He couldn't go to sleep one night,

because he had killed a fly by accident. A lost cat brings him to tears. In fact, though I blush to own it, he is a born sentimentalist.'

Fidelia, who considered it necessary that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children, observed Clive's son with genuine surprise, mingled perhaps with disapprobation. Weak and unhealthy he undoubtedly was, a circumstance which might point to hereditary punishment ; but his expression revealed a nature touched to fine issues, and his head was nobly shaped. Many sons of saints would have compared unfavourably with him.

'Listen, Rosny,' continued his father. 'I want you to sit by the fire in the hall and watch the clock. When the hands have moved ten minutes, you must come and tell me. Do you understand ?'

'I don't want to leave *you*,' whispered Rosny to the General.

'Ah, but I have reasons,' said Clive.

The child slipped from his friend's knee and went out of the room, with his usual halting step. For a second or two after he had gone no one said a word. General Winter broke the silence first.

'Fidelia,' he began, 'you now know more of your cousin's circumstances than you did an hour ago. The little boy is my brother Colin's only grandson,

his last representative. Will you pass over the discourteous treatment you have received, and treat him generously ? '

Fidelia's mouth contracted ; all the obstinacy of her nature had been evoked. 'I cannot feel sure of the child's lawful claims,' she said. A deep blush accentuated the meaning of her words.

'Good God, this is too much ! ' said Clive. ' My son shall never stoop to pick up a farthing of your ill-gotten gains. Keep the money you have perjured yourself to win. You think you are doing God service in robbing me that you may endow His church. It may be true ; perhaps He is on the side of knaves. But, if so, let me be damned in the company of honest men.'

Judith came a few steps forward, and then moved back. Her heart was beating wildly. She wished to say, 'Take my share of the money, Clive ; it is yours and Rosny's. I abhor the way in which Fidelia is acting. We have no right to a fortune which would never have been ours had the whole truth come to the light in time.' But shame kept her silent. Could she add hypocrisy to her other sins, and claim virtue at the expense of a woman far less guilty than she ? Lancelot also hesitated, shielding himself behind the larger offenders.

'I have only to say, as I said before,' broke in Herbert, 'that all I have to relinquish is yours, Clive, on condition that the will is not disputed. I don't know what your further plans may be, but if at any time you want to send Rosny home for education, I shall be glad to act as his guardian. He is the worst sufferer by all that has taken place, and you do right in acknowledging openly the claim he has upon you.'

'Many thanks for your approval,' said Clive. 'I am deeply obliged. Understand, once for all, that I am immensely fond of my son, and not an atom ashamed of the circumstances which gave him to me. The habit of preaching, Herbert, is a fatal one; cure it as fast as you can.'

Herbert had scarcely swallowed his anger, and the reply which rose to his lips, before Rosny came back.

'Your ten minutes are nearly over, Father,' he said, 'and I am rather tired. The hall's so dark; there are places I am afraid to look at. Riverscourt is different from what I had fancied. Let us go back to the ship.'

His pale little face seemed paler and smaller than ever, and its anxious expression was painful to watch. A child may sometimes look unhappy for a few

moments without injury to itself or others, but to see one devoured by anxiety is an experience which ought to make us angry with ourselves and the world.

‘We shall go back to-morrow,’ said Clive, lifting him up. ‘Come, I will carry you to bed.’

Rosny’s head sank on his father’s shoulder. He was completely tired out.

‘Good-bye, Uncle Roderick,’ continued Clive. ‘Good-bye, Herbert. You have behaved like the gentleman you are; that I freely own. If I accept your offer it is on account of my son. Were he not to be thought of I would toss my reputation to the winds and have the comfort of pulling some sanctified hypocrites down to social ruin with me.’

As he shut the door behind him Judith fell fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XII

WHILE Judith had been living at Riverscourt, Aubrey was working hard in Paris. The news of her increase of fortune came to him through a paragraph in the *Evening Planet*, heavily underlined and posted by Smith. When he knew his old friend was an heiress his heart sank not a little. Her letters up to this time had been kind, and even affectionate, but never confiding. It is true Judith possessed no skill in correspondence. She might take a pen between her fingers, but it always refused to become the vehicle of her thoughts. In consequence, she was one of those people who must be seen frequently if friendship is to last. During her visit to London Aubrey received two beautiful photographs—one of herself alone, one in which she was represented as reading to Lady Winter—and these kept the fire of love burning far more effectually than her commonplace letters.

After Lady Winter's death she ceased to write

altogether, and the second piece of news came, like the first, through Smith.

‘They tell me,’ he wrote, ‘that Miss Judith Hermann is making a sad rumpus because her brother won’t cancel his engagement and come home to live on an allowance from her. The young fellow would be a fool if he did. I am informed that there was danger of a law-suit, when this will of Lady Winter’s became known. Her son is not dead, as was supposed. I understand, on good authority, that the principal legatees each paid ten thousand down to pacify him and avoid lawyers’ fees, the rest paying in proportion, so he has netted a round sum. Some say thirty thousand, others forty. However, as I am not in possession of figures, I have hesitated to speak of it through the press, only inserting a paragraph dubiously worded.’

Not long after came another letter.

‘Miss Judith is going to live in London, with a certain Miss Felkin as companion. She has refused one offer of marriage already. They say the gentleman proposed, and was half accepted, before her Aunt’s death, when she was a penniless, uneducated girl. Uneducated she is likely to remain, but the other fault is cured ; so, naturally enough, he is angry that she should say “Yes,” then, and go back upon her word now. Women are heartless jades.’

On the whole, Aubrey was pleased with this intelligence, and wrote to Judith more openly than he had done for weeks. The letter received no reply. In the summer following her change of fortune he made a short visit to Rivington, but very little consolation was forthcoming there. The house in Cambridge Street stood empty, the Hermanns having moved to much more comfortable quarters, where, however, poor Adolf had quickly succumbed to influenza. Bertha and her mother still clung together, and told Aubrey the Imp was a comfort to them. Ludovic had risen rapidly in the opinion of the firm which sent him out, and they both were of opinion that he did right in declining a share of Judith's money.

'Lu was always so independent,' said Mrs. Herman; 'as a child he never would accept my hand over crossings.'

'And Judith is only getting possession of this fortune gradually,' added Bertha. 'As yet she is even a little hampered for ready money. A large estate can't be wound up quickly. Then, who knows what the next turn of events may be? Ludovic has acted wisely.'

'Where is Judith, now?' asked Aubrey, in a constrained voice.

‘She is in Switzerland with Miss Felkin, and may go on to Italy. Her nerves were exhausted by Lady Winter’s illness. She can’t sleep, it seems, and likes to be constantly travelling.’

‘She wouldn’t marry Mr. Field,’ said Mrs. Hermann, laying her hand on Aubrey’s sleeve. ‘Though he is a nice man, and so much in love. But Judith is not a scrap worldly. She will wait for the right man and the suitable offer.’

Poor Mrs. Hermann felt early romance revive, now that poverty no longer held her in its iron grasp. She hoped Judith would marry Aubrey after all, because he had once been poor, and never would despise the family or snub them when they came in his way.

He went back to Paris very much duller and sadder than when he started on his holiday; and so finished, under many disadvantages, the second year of his study there. Smith had reason to be satisfied with the progress his *protégé* had made, for by this time Aubrey could support himself. He illustrated children’s books, sent home sketches for the *Planet*, and scorned no work, however humble, if it brought honest remuneration and did not hinder the main purpose of his life.

The following spring, just after the anniversary

of Lady Winter's death, he came to London, with two pictures which were ready for exhibition, and made inquiry after Judith. She had taken a furnished house for the season, and answered him kindly enough, when he proposed calling upon her. Hitherto he had always associated every one of the name of Hermann with a happy-go-lucky method of existence, but, on being shown into Judith's drawing-room to wait, his ideas received a shock and were forced to readjust themselves.

On the walls hung beautiful copies of Italian pictures, a brass effigy of an abbess sitting in a chair—evidently part of the spoil of a sacked convent or desecrated church—caught his eye, and even the curtain covering the door was a piece of ancient tapestry, with exquisitely blended colours. A book, bound in olive-green calf, lay open on a small mother-of-pearl table, but when he ventured to glance at the title page he saw, to his amazement, that it was a copy of Dante. Could it be possible that Judith had joined the ranks of the educated, and become a student of Italian? As he looked and wondered, a light step came on the carpet behind him, and suddenly her mischievous eyes, dancing with fun, were raised to his.

'Are you astonished? Did you think you had

called at the wrong house? No, it is mine—that little volume which has taken away your breath.'

She was very beautiful—more beautiful by far than memory had told him. Either he had forgotten or else she had changed. Well, that was likely enough; two years and six months had passed since they last saw each other.

'I am not surprised now,' he said; 'nothing you can do would surprise me.'

'There's a well-turned compliment,' replied Judith; 'a charming compliment. Only I don't want you to utter sweet and false phrases. I should be better pleased if you laughed, and said, "Oh, you ridiculous Judith, do you think *your* brains can receive the meaning of Dante?" Why did you let the old brown copy at home sleep unopened on the attic shelf?'

'It was a very uninviting copy,' said Aubrey. 'I often took it up and threw it down again. I can't read Italian well now; I have had no time to learn.'

'Last winter,' continued Judith, 'Miss Felkin and I spent three months in Italy. We went to Rome and Florence and Siena and Perugia, and ever so many other places, and saw lovely pictures and statues and churches, till my head and heart and brain seemed too small to take in all the loveliness

there was. Then I discovered the depths of my ignorance, and I sent for books and began to read and study and ask questions. And I ended by finding out that a wonderful world exists, into which I might have gone long ago, if I had only understood how to open the door. *You* knew all about it, Aubrey. I remember little things you used to say which prove that you knew. And that is why Rivington ugliness and stupidity never ate into your soul as they ate into mine. You seemed to suffer more, but your suffering was only on the surface. In a single moment you knew how to escape to a region where everything was interesting. Isn't that true ? '

'Partly true. I read more than you, and I could paint.'

'Do you remember one perfectly odious day, when we were coming back from St. John's Market (imagine the audacity of naming a market after St. John !), and a dirty Irish woman sold you some daffodils and pale-green leaves for twopence ? You carried them home and put them in a vase and painted them. Were you not happy then ? When you had finished the picture you wrote underneath, "Daffodils, with the green world they live in." And Lu and I were so ignorant, we supposed the lines were as much your own as the picture.'

‘That *was* a mistake !’ said Aubrey, breaking into a laugh.

‘Yes ; but see how happy you could make yourself in the midst of vulgarity and coarseness. Wherever you went, some shape of beauty moved away the pall. I remember, chiefly, that mud lay seven inches thick in the streets that afternoon, and the shops in the London Road were selling off horrid hats and bonnets with flaming artificial roses. You only saw your daffodils.’

‘Well, you have escaped from poor old Rivington now !’

‘Yes, yes ; I don’t know why I am saying all this—perhaps to excuse myself. Those sordid years have left their mark.’

‘Do you know a great many people ? Do you visit, and go about much ?’

‘Oh yes. Some of the Riverscourt set are in town now. And General Winter is here. He doesn’t like me, but I go to his house because of his daughter Violet. His wife was a great heiress, but she is dead, and he lives alone with his daughter. Some day I will tell you about her——’

‘Is it not a fancy of yours about General Winter ? He couldn’t possibly dislike you.’

‘No, it is true ; it is not a fancy. Ever so many

people dislike me. They think I am hard and selfish, and calculating, and have no soul worth calling such. I am horrid sometimes, Aubrey. They are nearer the truth than you would believe. Only just for this half-hour alone with you, I want to go back and be my old self again. Directly I heard your voice I remembered Lu and our walks and talks, and adventures, and it was like a breath of something sweet.'

'Dear old Lu,' said Aubrey. 'When does he come home ?'

'I am going to Buenos Ayres in the autumn, because he thinks he cannot come yet. I wanted to go last autumn, but there were business matters to settle, and I waited. Oh, wasn't it hard that he refused to come back ? He said he couldn't, though he longed to see me more than he knew how to put on paper. He is just as loving as ever, but no one believes it. How odd people are ! They always look incredulous when love between a brother and sister is spoken of. If a woman loves a red-faced screaming baby, all the world understands, or pretends to. And if a girl drowns herself because of some stupid man she wants to marry, they understand that too. But our love, Ludovic's and mine, no living creature can see the point of.'

'I see the point,' said Aubrey, 'but sometimes I

have a pang, not of jealousy, but of hunger, when I hear you speak about him.'

'Ah, don't begin to talk in that way!' cried Judith, putting up her hand. 'It would spoil everything. Now tell me about your pictures and your plans for the future. How is the "Planet"? Tell me about yourself, Aubrey.'

He was willing enough. His eyes shone as they used to do when he was thirteen, and the whole story of his work, his adventures, his hopes, his fears, came rushing out in a torrent of eager speech.

'If I might paint your portrait,' he said at last; 'that is my ambition.'

'The worst is, I do so dislike being looked at,' said Judith, with a shiver. 'When any one looks at me for half a minute I want to turn away.'

'But I needn't stare into your eyes,' suggested Aubrey. 'Let me try.'

'If you promise to paint me in the character of the real Judith, with the head of Holofernes, I should consent. I studied Allori's Judith in the Uffizi, and Botticelli's exquisite one, stepping so lightly along, with blue eyes and a blue dress, and the maid coming behind. Yes; let me sit for Judith, and take Emma in the character of maid (Emma is dear old Felkin), and I almost think I shall like being stared at. I

can give you the whole benefit of my eyes then—see ?'

She looked him straight in the face, and he was the first to turn away.

'That wasn't you,' he said. 'It is not necessary to act the part so tremendously.'

'But those are my conditions. Unless I am the historical Judith, I won't let you paint me. And the head of the murdered man—it must come in somewhere—very gaunt and grey, and sad.'

She laughed while saying this, and went across the room to bring a morocco case.

'I want you to dine here to-night. You will see Miss Felkin, and some other people as well. I have made her happy; I give her a hundred a year, and she has a hundred under the will, so she is very charitable, and sends presents to her nephews and nieces, and cousins of the fifty-first degree. She gives subscriptions as well, with her name in full—Miss Emma Jane Felkin. She thrives like an old olive-tree, and looks every bit as grey and soft, and sweet. Mother is happy, too, though she likes best to stay in Rivington with Bertha. I begged and prayed her to live with me. A great many people are happier because I have two thousand a year. It isn't much, after all. If I were a man who wanted to drink good

wine, and keep horses, it would seem a mere pittance. But with no expensive tastes, and no house and no tenants, I get on reasonably well.'

She laughed a second time, a hard, forced laugh, without an atom of mirth in it, and opened the morocco case.

'Tell me,' said Aubrey, 'if you are happy yourself. Of course I knew you would make others happy.'

'How can I help being happy?' cried Judith. 'There is such pleasure in surrounding oneself with beautiful things. All these pictures I brought from Italy. Oh, if you had seen the frights which were hanging up when I took the house! And then I have such lovely jewels—I didn't buy those; two thousand a year won't get everything—Aunt Winter left them to me. It is my nature to be fond of colour, especially in precious stones. Now and then, when I am dull, I take out my emeralds, and some beautiful sapphires set with diamonds, and enjoy them all by myself, just like a baby. Oh yes, it is worth everything to be tolerably rich.'

'There must come an end to such enjoyment,' said Aubrey. 'Even a millionaire can only wear one coat at a time, and eat one dinner every day.'

'I know that's true in theory,' said Judith, 'but

I haven't realised its truth yet, as regards myself. The pleasures money brings seem inexhaustible, when youth and health and good looks keep it company. One must have all three; and knowledge too; for wealth, coupled with ignorance, becomes vulgar. That is why I tried to read and learn, and ask questions from people who knew more than I.'

'Is that the reason you study Dante?' said Aubrey, looking at the little green volume.

'Yes,' replied Judith, quite simply.

'Is it the only reason?'

'Well, I can't honestly say I enjoy reading him very much as yet.'

They both laughed, but Aubrey felt rather sick while doing so.

'I see you are shocked,' continued Judith. 'You and I are made very differently. I covet success for those I love best. I should like them all to succeed, and be praised, and talked of, and taste the sweetness of life *now*. What's the use of being famous, when their bodies have crumbled to dust and they neither know nor care? Do you suppose Millet is glad that his pictures sell for huge prices, and are admired all over Europe? He is beyond the reach of such gladness. While he lived his children cried for bread, and his wife looked like a starved animal.'

‘He would have been more wretched still,’ broke in Aubrey, ‘if he had seen commonplace pictures, with his name attached to them, hanging on the walls of some bourgeois home. *That* ignominy would have broken his heart. Riches and success are not things which fill a man’s soul. They are well enough, if they come as the reward of Genius.’

‘Of course I should like the genius too,’ said Judith. ‘My appetite, I confess, is enormous. But, honestly, Aubrey, do you not wish for riches and success—you, who know what it is to be very poor? I never attend to the things Denis and Violet say, because they know nothing at all about it. They have been wrapped in luxury ever since they opened their eyes. But you were differently brought up. Remember your dreary home and the difficulty there was in paying the taxes and the weekly bills. Oh, I hate to think of it. Many artisans’ children, in fact, all of them, are better off than we were.’

‘Yes; it was all detestable,’ said Aubrey, ‘and I am not in love with poverty; certainly not with genteel poverty, in the back streets of an English town. But there are some things worse. A man may be poor and keep his self-respect. If we think too much about riches, we might end by being willing to receive them as the price of shame.’

'Well, well,' said Judith, impatiently, 'let us speak of more cheerful matters. Look at the cameos I have in this case. I bought them in Rome. The pin is for you; the ring I am taking to Ludovic.'

'You shouldn't give me such a beautiful present,' said Aubrey, looking at her wistfully.

'For auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne. Don't say you mean to refuse the poor little thing when I chose it on purpose for you. Let me fasten it in your scarf myself. There! Now do smile and look happy. You look as if I disappointed you, as if you were ready to shed tears. Remember life goes by like a flash of lightning. We shall soon be divided; so, for the *short, short* moment we are together, let us be kind to each other and extract all the enjoyment from existence we can. Are you sorry I have learnt to know the value of this beautiful world?'

'No; I am not sorry,' said Aubrey.

But he went away with a heart as heavy as a stone, and left one still heavier behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE day, in the early part of July, Fidelia came to call on Judith. The cousins had scarcely seen each other since they parted at Riverscourt, two or three weeks after Clive's sudden appearance. It was only natural that some important changes should be found in each of them, but Judith, who was a keen observer, considered that Fidelia had altered more than any outward circumstances could explain. She looked as unworldly as ever, but her face showed an amazing cheerfulness, and her voice had lost its peculiar tone of sanctity.

'What has happened?' asked Judith. 'You are no longer Fidelia.'

'Do you see a difference?'

'Why, yes; you don't look repressed any more, and your voice is fuller, more natural. You used to speak from the back of your throat. What has happened? Do tell me—quick! I am burning to know.'

‘I think I am happier than I was when we lived together.’

‘You *think* you are ; I am sure of it. Are you going to be married to some one very nice, some one with fifteen thousand a year, who will insist on making you comfortable, and taking you to all sorts of delightful places ? ’

‘No, no ; your head runs on marriage and money. I have changed my faith—that is the reason I am happy.’

‘Is that all ? ’ said Judith, in a tone of disappointment. ‘I hoped you were going to tell me some interesting news. Changed your faith ! What did you do that for ? ’

‘Because I couldn’t help it. Oh, Judith, I have shaken off such a load—I feel like a bird set free from a narrow cage ! When I see the sky I am forced to sing ; the whole world looks different. How did I manage to carry my chains so long and so submissively ? ’

‘Do you mean you have gone over to the Roman Church ? ’

‘No, not that ; I am free, I belong to no Church. All those dogmas and observances, which enveloped me like grave-clothes, have fallen away. I am *free* Judith. But of course you cannot

understand the rapture. You never lived behind prison bars.'

'I am confused,' said Judith. 'I don't know how to picture you without dogmas and observances. They were *you*.'

'No, no; I had a life outside all the time I appeared most slavish. Secretly my soul was consumed by doubt; I fasted and prayed; I punished myself by every device I could think of; but still the doubts clung. One day I sent to the library for Newman's great work on the "Development of Christian Doctrine." It is said to be one that makes Roman Catholics. I wished to be made a Roman Catholic, and to escape into a Church where the mind must sleep, because all right of private judgment is forbidden. But Mudie sent by mistake a book of Francis Newman's "Phases of Faith." When I read the title I hesitated. Then I thought, "Shall I refuse from sheer terror to read what may be said on the other side of the question? If I recoil, is it not a sign that I hold my faith by a single thread? Honest conviction dreads no argument." So I opened the book and began. It put my inmost thoughts into language; before I had read half I knew that the creeds in which I had tried to believe were null and void. Will you think me mad if I tell you I rushed

into the garden and kissed the pear blossom, and put my arms round the trunk of the beech-tree on the lawn, as if I had been a child of four years old ? All my faith in dogma had gone, and left me a free creature.'

' Sic transit,' said Judith.

' How can you laugh ? But you never suffered as I have done.'

' I have read "Phases of Faith," though. I came across it in the *salle à manger* of an hotel at Turin. I didn't notice the author's name. I only remember he took off first one article of belief and then another, as if he were slowly undressing, until he left himself in a state of nakedness—not trailing clouds of glory either. I must be an utter heathen, for I was forced to follow him to the very middle of the process before we stood on equal ground. He began with more mental garments than I. But at the end——'

' Were you not convinced ? '

' No ; I am not sure that I was. I thought he made religion too much a matter of intellect. It seems to me that there is something behind and beyond everything which he doesn't even begin to explain. Of course it is a long time since I read the book, but I remember thinking, when I put it down, that the life of Christ was very mysterious, and the

Gospels quite as perplexing as they had been before I began.'

'Strange!' said Fidelia. 'As I tell you, I felt emancipated, and have never known a tremor of doubt since.'

'A tremor of faith, you mean,' said Judith. 'Are you going to enjoy yourself at last, and live like other people?'

'I still mean to work for the good of humanity. I can do it with more hope and courage than before. It was never an act of virtue on my part to renounce the world; the world renounced me. An ugly woman such as I am is not tempted to frivolity.'

'Well, you *are* truthful,' said Judith, 'and more than truthful. You might have had quite half a dozen admirers if you had chosen to be agreeable. Very few women are wholly destitute of charm, and you most certainly are not one of them.'

'But I have no desire to be admired or sought after,' said Fidelia, reddening a little at the distinctness with which Judith limited the number of possible admirers to six. 'My hope now is to make congenial friends, and work in a healthy atmosphere for healthy purposes. My former aims were disgustingly selfish. I was always being told to aim at a high place in heaven. How self-conscious such

ideas make people! A manufactured saint is a detestable prig; just a cheap Birmingham imitation of the real thing.'

'Then you don't regret your past beliefs at all?'

'Not a single one.'

'I always thought your ideas mistaken,' said Judith. 'You seemed (to my ignorant eyes) to practise religion as my father used to say bad teachers made their pupils practise music—giving them difficult pieces, all technique and execution, instead of teaching them to love beautiful sound in the very simplest form possible. You never loved God, Fidelia. Surely that must be the first step in religion?'

'I was told not to trust emotion,' said Fidelia; 'to begin by the exercise of duty, and look to the other as the reward. But it is a new subject for you to discuss.'

'Oh yes; I am an outsider. Tell me what you think of all that happened at Riverscourt. Do you still say it was well Clive lost the money?'

'I do; and one great burden has left my conscience. Now and then I fancied I had influenced you too much, and made you take a particular course against your convictions. But now it strikes me otherwise. Clive is better without the charge of a

fortune ; and we were entitled, in the larger interests of humanity, to act as we did. Right and wrong cannot be mapped out by hard-and-fast lines. They are not concrete things, as I used to imagine ; they are changeable quantities. The religion of the future will be purely the religion of service. We must do what is best for the larger number of our fellow-creatures, disregarding all conventional laws.'

' Well, well,' said Judith, ' I don't follow all this very clearly, though I see the drift. But Rosny—you cannot be shocked any more because he was born without benefit of clergy ? '

' I am not shocked. Still, as the child of an unprincipled parent, it might be a misfortune if he inherited much. I shall not lose sight of him when Clive dies, and that must be soon.'

' Why do you say so — have you heard anything ? '

' He is very ill ; he went back to America after we saw him, and returned in a dying state. The Winters have asked him to their house in Bournemouth. Herbert thinks he cannot recover.'

' You *do* take things coolly,' said Judith, who had perceptibly changed colour. ' I can't speak of any one's death until it has happened. What does Herbert say to your new ideas ? '

'We need not enter into that,' said Fidelia, wincing. 'He stays at Riverscourt, and works on the old lines.'

'Just one question more. Did no one influence you except Francis Newman--no man, I mean?'

'How can you ask such a thing? Of course not! Judith, you are quite hopelessly shallow and flippan't.'

'But it is the law of life,' said Judith. 'Did not even Saint Teresa get John of the Cross to help her? And didn't Harriet Martineau get Mr. Harrison—no, Atkinson—to join with her in writing a book full of shocking ideas? Ever since Creation men and women have influenced each other. When their thoughts combine something seems to evolve which would otherwise never have existence or a name. Are you sure no friend has been influencing you, now?'

'Quite sure; I have spoken to no living soul, except Herbert'

'And he couldn't influence a cat! Well, I must believe, then, that the Cardinal's brother is responsible for all. You are a very remarkable woman, Fidelia. I don't care what you say about being ugly. You might have founded a sect, or formed a *salon*, or done almost anything you liked.'

‘ You have changed as much as I,’ remarked Fidelia. ‘ Have you been to school, Judith ? ’

‘ You observe my acquaintance with books ? ’ said Judith. ‘ Oh yes, I quote now with the best. Denis says I am losing originality. He frightened me to such an extent that I abstained from reading for six weeks, lest my mind should become loaded with other people’s thoughts. At the end of that time I perceived I was bankrupt of ideas, so I sent for the “Encyclopædia Britannica,” and went steadily through.’

‘ Denis ! Is he in town ? ’

‘ We quarrelled yesterday,’ said Judith ; ‘ perhaps he has gone. He says I have no heart, that I play him false, and all manner of things. I am going to a dance to-night, and I rather hope he won’t be there ; I enjoy myself more without him. Oh, Fidelia, you do miss a world of joy in not dancing. I forget every single one of my cares when I begin to dance ; there’s rapture in it—I feel almost religious at a ball.’

‘ You have added smoking to your accomplishments, I see,’ said Fidelia, touching a box of cigarettes.

‘ Yes ; but I don’t care about it. I have too much energy to be fond of lazy pleasures. Felkin says I am the only fashionable lady she ever saw or heard

of who was fond of early rising. Fancy being called a fashionable lady ! Poor old Felkin !'

'I meant to say so much,' continued Fidelia, 'but it seems impossible ever to be serious in your company. I have a plan for my life, which I thought we might have talked over together. I am so anxious to help others who may be suffering as I did.'

'I always connect those four words with you,' said Judith— "*I am so anxious.*" You say them, and then your forehead knits. Well, go on; never mind my rudeness. It is only me !'

'When I remember what a burden the habit of self-examination had become,' continued Fidelia, 'how every action, even the most minute, was looked into and criticised, how I questioned myself about my motives, about my hidden impulses, until nothing was left to Nature, I wonder I did not go mad. There may be many others toiling at their work, cased in the same suit of chain armour.'

'Not very many,' said Judith; 'I judge by what I see.'

'I have thought a great deal,' said her cousin. 'That book I spoke of helped to break down opinions which were undermined by secret doubt before; but I have gone much further since reading it. I ought to try to teach others.'

'For pity's sake don't attempt such a thing!' cried Judith. 'This idea of teaching is in danger of becoming a mania. Remember you taught all day long, while I was with you, and now you say it was mistaken teaching. Doesn't it ever occur to you that your present views may be mistaken too?'

'I am sure they are not,' said Fidelia, turning pale.

'You were just as sure before.'

'I have told you that while I seemed sure my soul was tormented by doubts.'

'So it will be again.'

'You are very discouraging,' said Fidelia; 'I can't bring myself to despair in that way. Ever since I was a child this duty of helping others has weighed upon me. At least you will allow that I ought to speak to those whom my former teaching has misled. There is Lancelot.'

'He has not enough religion to fill a cream jug,' said Judith. 'Why talk to him?'

'Oh, you misunderstand his character; he is full of religious instincts. Every Easter he comes to confession, and you know, of course, those exquisite hymns he wrote—the one to his Guardian Angel, and—'

'Oh, don't!' cried Judith, with a face of disgust.

‘He is welcome to confess his sins, as long as I am out of hearing; but I hate even to hear his hymns mentioned. It amazes me that Herbert and you can see the matter differently. Herbert used to speak of him with a sort of sentimental sympathy, as if his troubles deserved compassion. He is the sort of man I loathe.’

‘He does deserve compassion,’ said Fidelia, in a low voice. ‘I want to have a long talk with him; there are things on my mind I feel impelled to say.’

‘Tell him to keep the Ten Commandments,’ said Judith, ‘or as many as he can without putting too great a strain upon his feelings. I don’t believe in religion which doesn’t result in goodness; that is the only sure and certain test. Oh dear, what am I saying?’

‘Have you hurt yourself?’ asked Fidelia, anxiously. ‘You look so white. Your face has changed all in a moment. Can I do anything for you?’

‘No, no, nothing; I am not ill, only, as I spoke, it suddenly flashed across my mind that—that—’

‘Yes,’ said Fidelia, waiting for the end of the sentence.

‘That I may end in the circle of hell where the

hypocrites are. What need have I to prate about goodness? Now is your opportunity, Fidelia; preach to me.'

But Fidelia said nothing at all.

CHAPTER XIV

JUDITH went to the ball and danced to her heart's content. She felt strangely exhilarated in consequence of that conversation with Fidelia. About midnight Denis presented himself, asking for a waltz, and, though she knew her conduct would be blamed by those who understood their position, she conceded his request, giving him, in the end, not one dance, but many.

'I feel so excited to-night,' she said. 'I might be Cinderella, when her godmother sent her to the ball, or the Sleeping Beauty, when she opened her eyes after a thousand years. This afternoon Fidelia and I had a long talk.'

'Talks with Fidelia are not usually exciting.'

'This one was. Only imagine! she has given up her faith.'

'Never!'

'Yes, she has.'

'Well, of all wonders,' began Denis, and stopped.

'Fidelia is nothing if not honest,' said Judith.
'She says openly that her opinions were mistaken,
and that her prayers were poured into space.'

'But I can't imagine why this should excite you.
It sounds rather sad to me.'

'Oh, I hardly know why. For one thing,
Fidelia's serious face and shabby dresses were a
continual reproach. And then I think I am glad
that she agrees with me, there's no use in discussing
theological ideas about right and wrong, we must
each do what is best, at the moment, and look no
further. It is a pity she should have wasted her
energy for the best years of her life. Nuns in their
convents, fakirs in India, devotees half the world
over—what are they doing? Trying to make ropes
out of sea sand.'

'I hate to hear of people turning against things
they once believed,' said Denis. 'If they are forced
to do it they ought to be humble, and lie low for a
couple of years at the very least. Don't speak of
Fidelia. Give me one more dance.'

'This must be the last, then. I shall go when it
is ended.'

'Tell me if you still mean to visit your brother
in the autumn?'

'I am counting the hours till I can start.'

‘Shall you never love any one but him? It seems rather dangerous; he will marry and forsake you.’

‘Oh, I dare say; I can wait till he does.’

‘What has become of the artist friend—is he in Paris?’

‘No; in London. But don’t let us spend our time in talking. Listen to the music. I want to dance.’

Denis was no reader of Robert Browning, else some lines from ‘The Last Ride Together’ might have recurred to his memory. They flew round the room, Judith half carried out of herself by pure joy of movement, he saying, in thought, ‘I shall be alone this time to-morrow, but the present moment is worth all.’

Many compliments fell to Judith’s share that evening. She was named by one after another as the most beautiful girl present, and those who did not know the truth envied Denis his good fortune. At half-past three, not in the least tired, she drove home alone, for the lady who gave the ball was an intimate friend of hers, and Miss Felkin had been excused the office of chaperone. Even in the carriage her feet moved, as if to music.

On the hall table a letter was lying, directed in

Bertha's scrambling, half-legible writing. Judith felt in no humour for a letter from her sister just then, so she took it upstairs unopened, telling herself that to-morrow would be time enough to read about the children's lessons and the cooking done by the new kitchen range.

Miss Felkin was asleep, so was the maid, Judith being considerate to her servants; but some cocoa had been placed beside an etna in her bedroom, and everything looked cosy and sleep-inviting. The ball dress could soon be tossed on a sofa in an adjoining room, to lie there until Suzanne came at seven o'clock and folded it away. Judith's window opened on a large garden. She stood beside it for some minutes, watching the soft light of morning touch every tree and shrub with delicate fairy fingers. Then, by natural context, her thoughts went to South America and the descriptions Ludovic had given of maidenhair growing wild by the carriage road, and flowers of brilliant colouring, luxuriant to excess.

After all, it might be better to read what Bertha said, and make sure they were all well before going to sleep. A single sheet of paper came out of the envelope. Bertha's effusions usually covered two, and she had a senseless habit of crossing her letters

as if notepaper were not cheap. What possessed her to write so few words now ?

‘ DEAR JUDITH,—Can you come home for a day or two ? Mother wants to see you. She is not quite so well as usual, and we have rather anxious news from Buenos Ayres.

‘ Your affectionate, BERTHA WATTS.’

Judith’s heart gave a wild leap ; she knew what those carefully studied sentences meant. Her mother would never ask her to come to Rivington on account of an illness of her own. It was already long past four o’clock. She must dress and go like lightning to the station. Only, when did the first train start—and how could she possibly decipher Bradshaw with her head in confusion, and her soul on fire ? Oh, why had she not looked at the letter before dismissing her carriage ?

‘ Miss Felkin, quick, wake—I have a summons ; I must go home at once.’

‘ You cannot, my dear,’ said Miss Felkin, startled out of a profound sleep. ‘ It is the very middle of the night.’

‘ No, no ; it is early morning. I am going up to call Suzanne ; she must find a cab or send for the carriage.’

‘There are no cabs about just now, and it will take long enough to rouse the men in the mews. They are some way off, remember.’

‘Then I shall go on foot.’

‘Let me look at a railway guide first. The earliest train is five-thirty—you have lost that. The next is ten-thirty.’

‘Oh, it is not possible! So many hours!’

‘My dear, what good can be done by hurrying? If they had needed you at once they would have telegraphed. Wait, dear, wait; you *must* wait, there is no help for it. Look at the list of trains with your own eyes.’

Judith walked up and down the room, while every moment seemed like twelve. Her white face and distracted eyes settled on Miss Felkin’s memory, haunting it for many a week.

‘They should have told me the whole truth,’ she kept repeating; ‘it is suspense I cannot endure.’

‘Perhaps they don’t know very much themselves.’

‘Oh, that’s horrible; because, if they don’t know, I shall live in agony for days! This is cruel—this is eternal punishment. But they must know something they have not said—“*rather anxious news*”—and they keep the news back; they don’t say what it

is, so they must know—do you see, they *must* know it is certain that they do.'

'When you reach home the anxiety may be past.'

'It may be, it may be; but I am terribly afraid.'

'You must try to trust in God, my dear,' said Miss Felkin.

From her lips the advice did not sound hackneyed. She had lived through shocking catastrophes, and knew well enough that our homes stand on the top of volcanoes, which, at any moment, may shoot out fire and sweep us all into ruin.

'I can't,' said Judith. 'And this waiting is the worst of all. If I had only opened Bertha's letter last night!'

'It would not have made the least difference,' said Miss Felkin; 'I am sure it would not.'

She was right; there was no need to chafe at delay, for the blow Judith dreaded had already fallen, and all that was mortal of her brother lay beneath the soil of the new world.

CHAPTER XV

AUBREY was one of those people whom fortune never smiles on for long at a time. It was emphatically true in his case that Happiness showed herself the fickle friend who paid casual visits, while Sorrow planted herself by his bedside and brought out her knitting-needles. He sold two of his pictures for prices which exceeded all hope, came to Rivington, very much cheered, to tell Smith of his success, caught influenza on the journey, and lay ill in his friend's house for five long weeks. When at last strength showed signs of returning, he sent for writing materials and began a letter.

'Nonsense,' said his host, who happened to pounce upon him at the wrong moment. 'Put that pen away. You may draw if you choose, but writing I do object to. Why, you can't write! Those scrawls look as if a spider had dipped its legs in the ink and run across the paper.'

'Only one letter.'

'Miss Hermann,' said Smith, coolly glancing at the envelope. 'She is not in London—she is here, at her mother's.'

'Then I can see her?'

'Not so fast; get well first.'

'I shall do that more quickly when I have seen her.'

'This won't do,' said Smith uneasily. 'You must know the truth sooner or later. They had unpleasant news from Buenos Ayres.'

'Lu—is he ill?'

'He is dead; yellow fever.'

Aubrey turned even paler than he had been a moment before.

'The old story,' continued Smith, 'as old as the hills. They don't know what sort of nursing he had; that's the worst feature in the case. And of course the funeral was rushed—all over the evening of the day he died. These things won't bear thinking of. The mother is calm enough. Judith lost her senses, I am told, and screamed in delirium for two nights. Women never realise the course of events won't stop for them. What do they expect, I should like to know?'

'I must go and see them,' said Aubrey, raising himself with difficulty.

'Steady,' said Smith, 'there's no need to carry influenza to them just yet; wait till you have a clean bill of health.'

He knew Aubrey's affection for Judith, and it vexed him, because, in his opinion, she was a girl who would never care about any one, unless the world's verdict agreed with her own. Aubrey's appearance at that time betrayed the poverty of his up-bringing. He was pale and thin, and had a trick of blushing before he spoke. His shoulders also should have been an inch broader. Smith's pride in his friend did not blind him to these disadvantages, but his generous heart burned with anger at the thought of Judith observing them and bestowing adverse criticism. His hope was that she would soon marry a rich barbarian, with no ideas, and plenty of impudence. Then, and not till then, would his fears be set at rest. So he made one excuse after another to prevent a meeting, until Aubrey took the matter in his own hands, and insisted on going to the Hermanns' house, though still scarcely able to walk.

Mrs. Hermann was quietly sad, Bertha much taken up with her children. Everything looked the same as when he was there last, except that the oilcloth in the passage was beginning to be shabby,

and the Imp, who liked gardening, had planted a Virginia creeper outside the drawing-room window.

'Judith is in the little breakfast-room,' said Mrs. Hermann. 'I shall be so glad if you will go and see her.'

'But she must be asked first,' said Aubrey. 'Let me wait until you have told her I am here.'

Mrs. Hermann and Bertha exchanged significant glances, and without daring to say another word, or ask another question, he followed one of them down a narrow passage to the door of the breakfast-room. Judith was sitting in a deck chair, with her hands lying clasped on her knee. Beautiful flowers filled the air with sweetness; rich embroidery silks were piled on a table beside her; books and photographs had been placed where she must almost of necessity see them—loving hands had made that commonplace room as attractive as a fairy bower, yet she noticed and cared for nothing.

'Here is Aubrey, my dear,' said Mrs. Hermann, in tones of forced cheerfulness.

Judith raised her eyes and sighed heavily, but did not speak.

'He has come on purpose to sit with you,' continued her mother. 'You may like a talk by yourselves. I will go to the children.'

Oh, the silence of the room after Mrs. Hermann had gone ! Aubrey fancied he could hear even the rose-leaves falling, so intense was the stillness. Judith never changed her attitude, never spoke, never looked at him. When, with some timidity, he ventured on stealing a glance at her face, he found it pitifully altered. Grief had almost robbed her of loveliness. At last the clock on the chimney-piece struck three, and she shivered from head to foot.

‘It was at three o’clock he died,’ she said, and fell once more into silence.

‘My dearest,’ whispered Aubrey, ‘speak to me. I have been here half an hour, and you have never uttered a word until now.’

‘I ought to have been with him ; I should have been, but for the money. It was the money kept me here. Did you know that ? The cursed, cursed money ! ’

‘My poor Judith,’ cried Aubrey. ‘Tell me all about it ; all you can. I am burning to hear. He is my brother, you know, as well as yours.’

‘He is your brother ? ’

‘Can death change what has been ? Memory is possession, and brings hope.’

‘No ; not hope.’

Then once more that awful silence resumed its reign. Aubrey did not say another word, only came closer and laid his hand, wasted with illness, on her knee. The years which had divided them vanished from his memory ; so did Denis. It seemed to him as if they must have belonged to each other from the first ; as if they had come into existence for no other purpose than mutual love. After five minutes she spoke :

‘ You sit in the dark very patiently. It is a great test of friendship to sit with some one in the dark.’

‘ Look up ! The room is brilliant with sunshine.’

‘ That’s strange. I fancied we were quite in the dark. Oh yes, I see the sun now.’

‘ Judith, my beloved, you must rouse yourself. Don’t think—talk to me ; I need consolation terribly, and he is beyond the reach of pain.’

‘ How do you know ? We know nothing. I used to be glad to know nothing. Only the night before that letter came I was glad. Now I am dying because I do not know. It is so strange—such an awful separation. Not a word, not a sound—oh, why cannot I make him hear ? ’

‘ What do you want to say to him, dearest ? ’

‘ A world of things ! I want to tell him how sorry I am I was not there. I want to say—— Oh, *foolish*

things, Aubrey—just love and sympathy, and foolish things. And I shall never talk to him, wisely or foolishly, again.'

'Tell me about it,' said Aubrey; 'that is, if you can.'

'He was so badly nursed,' whispered Judith, 'they did not take alarm soon enough. He came in at dinner time and complained of a racking headache. He said he felt desperately sick. Frank Hewett was there, one of the men who lived with him, but he had no experience; he didn't send for a doctor. Lu was alone all night, and early in the morning he wandered to Hewett's room, half delirious. He thought he was being hunted about by people who disliked him, but then a flash of reason must have come and told him he was going to die, for he said, "I should so like to have seen Judy again." That is all we know; not a word more.'

Her voice ceased with a little sob.

'Look at me,' said Aubrey—'lift your dear eyes and look at me, just once. Ah, that's right! I want you to listen to something I have to say—something about Lu.'

Judith's face was so thin that her eyes seemed unnaturally large. They fastened on Aubrey now, with a gaze of intense eagerness.

' You may be making him very unhappy. Remember the picture your mind always sees of his desolate room in Buenos Ayres is a picture out of the past ; he is not there any longer. It is dangerous to brood over things that are done with, lest, in doing so, we lose knowledge of what is happening at the present moment. Can we think of something he would like us to do for him *now* ? '

Judith made an effort to raise herself, but was obliged from weakness to fall back.

' I want to explain,' she said, ' to tell him my heart is breaking because I was not there.'

' Perhaps that is already explained.'

' Do you mean that he knows my thoughts ? '

' Have you not said that we can tell nothing—only guess and look into darkness ? '

' But he may know ; it is conceivable. And there's a secret on my conscience — one that no human being has ever heard.'

' Can you tell it to *me* ? '

' Not for worlds ! You would think I had done wrong; so would Lu. It has tortured me often. It relates to the money.'

' Is there no one you can confide in ? '

' If I were resolved, I might tell one person ; the one it concerns most. But the consequences would

be very cruel—they would reach out far, and cause quarrelling and tumult, and perhaps a scandal in the face of the world.'

'I cannot judge without knowing all. I wish I could help you.'

'No one can help me; I am alone; it is my punishment.'

'Try and sleep; you are tired. Let me get a pillow for you, and then shut your eyes and sleep.'

'No; I am not tired. You think my mind has gone astray? I wish it had! Often I say to myself, "If it were all a dream." But it is real enough. I could convince you in six words, and you would be too much shocked to know what to say.'

'I should love you and take your part, and defend you, if need were, against the world.'

'I am not afraid of the world. I should have told long ago, only I couldn't endure the thought of what Lu would feel. And now perhaps he knows.'

Aubrey still doubted if her words were rational. He was glad to have roused her from melancholy, but dreaded lest nerve depression should assume another and perhaps more dangerous form. With some difficulty, and a little help from him, she succeeded in rising, and put up her hand to push back the hair from her temples.

‘How weak and strange I feel ! I scarcely know how to stand. Isn’t it sad, Aubrey, that Lu, whom every one loved and made much of, should have died alone, while I was in London. I was in the theatre at the time he died, and never knew he needed me. Just think of that ! But I mustn’t let my thoughts go wandering back, lest I forget what there is to do. Perhaps, if I do it, I shall lose this horrid weight on my brain, and be able to cry a little. Oh, I do so want to cry ! I can’t shed a single tear. But, Aubrey, if I do what I am thinking of, there will be quarrelling and confusion, and every one will blame every one else, and they will say—— Well, I needn’t care what they say, Lu is not here. It would have broken his heart to know such things were said of his sister.’

‘Are you *sure* you must do this ?’ said Aubrey, wistfully. ‘Cannot I undertake every responsibility for you ?’

‘No, no ; not possible. Only I can undo what I have done. Perhaps, when it is over, I shall feel myself again. I am tormented by a dreadful feeling I can scarcely explain—almost as if I were changed into another person—a wicked creature, whom Lu cannot love. But no penance will bring him back, or take away my remorse for having left him alone to die. “ Cannot you bring again my blessed

yesterday?" Who said that—some unhappy woman, as unhappy as I?"

"Have you not one word for *me*?" cried Aubrey.
"Don't you care about leaving me alone?"

"Poor Aubrey!" said Judith. "How tired you look! I didn't see your face till this moment. You have been ill?"

"For five weeks."

"And I never heard! I have been lost in terrible thoughts; grief has made me selfish. The last thing I remember hearing about you was the success of your pictures, and I wrote to say how glad I was. Did you get the letter?"

"Yes; I had the letter."

"And since then you have been ill; I am so sorry. When I come back we can have another talk, and it must not be about myself. It must be about you; don't let me be selfish."

"Where are you going?" asked Aubrey, with a shoot of fear.

"To Bournemouth. I shall not stay long; in four or five days everything will be done, and I can come back. I shall live in Rivington for the rest of my life—probably in this house." She glanced around her with a nervous shudder.

"Are you sure you will be able to do as you say?"

‘Yes ; I am sure. It is true that twice before I made plans and was thwarted, but this time there’s no doubt of succeeding. Tell me what day of the week it is ?’

‘Tuesday.’

‘Then on Monday, at the very latest, I shall come back. Only I shall be poor ; my fortune will have gone.’

‘Thank God.’

‘You think that will be something to thank Him for ? Well, so do I.’

She put out both her hands to take his, with a look which reminded him of the little Judy of long ago.

‘Something you said has helped me very much. You told me Lu was not in that desolate room at Buenos Ayres any more. It is strange. I have a picture of the room in my mind. Until you came I saw it always in front of me. I had a queer feeling that he was always there : always dying. But of course it is over. He is living somewhere else. I feel sure he is, and if I keep thinking of the past I may lose an opportunity of helping him in the present—of doing the only thing which can reunite us ; we are divided till I have done it. How wonderful I didn’t see that before !’

'You were so ill and unhappy' said Aubrey, 'and you are ill now. Be very careful, dearest. You terrify me when you speak of taking long journeys.'

'I shall be better as soon as I begin to move,' said Judith. 'If I sit quietly the misery will come back. I mustn't think, I must act. Oh, Aubrey, you have been wonderfully good to me, I shall never forget it !'

'Love doesn't keep accounts,' said Aubrey. 'I have not been good, I have done what it impelled me to do.'

'Why should you love me?' asked Judith. 'There's the mystery. Look at my face ; it is not pretty any more. I might be a middle-aged woman ; all sorts of lines have come round my mouth and on my forehead, and my high spirits have gone. I am a dull companion. My money is soon going. There is nothing left to attract.'

'I always hated your money,' said Aubrey, 'because it divided us. And though it broke my heart to see you unhappy, I can't help feeling that there is a rich sweetness in any condition which makes you need my help. As for beauty, I like your face now more than I ever did before.'

Judith gazed at him with wonder. She had always supposed that her influence depended solely

upon her beauty and reckless spirits. It was hard to believe that one should exist who clung to her when physical charm and mental vigour were alike in danger of being wrecked.

‘ You are different from other men,’ she said. ‘ You love as women do. It is cruel you should have to suffer in this way. I bring trouble on every one who cares for me. Why *do* you care for me? Wouldn’t it be wiser to forget that such a creature lives?’

‘ Wiser, perhaps; but impossible.’

‘ You will know soon that I have been unworthy of love, and then your affection will be killed.’

‘ Never.’

‘ We shall see,’ said Judith, with a heavy sigh. ‘ I couldn’t be surprised if it were. But whatever happens I shall be glad to remember that you came here to-day and saved me.’

CHAPTER XVI

IT was late in the afternoon of a hot August day when Judith reached General Winter's house in Bournemouth. She had gone through a great deal of opposition before starting on this journey, and her friends only yielded at last because they thought it would be dangerous to thwart her wishes while she was so ill. At all events, action and movement were safer than the deadly stillness of those weeks in Rivington after the fatal news had come.

Violet Winter, the General's only unmarried daughter, was a little delicate creature, with a face which never seemed to grow old, though her years could not have been less than fifty, and delicate health had been her portion ever since she was born. Her reception of Judith was very affectionate. She had too much tact to show the least surprise at this sudden visit, which seemed like a freak caused by mental distress. Every one knew what Ludovic's death must mean to his sister.

'I hope you have good rooms at your hotel,' she said. 'Is Miss Felkin with you?'

'Yes, she is. I only intend to stay till to-morrow, so the rooms don't greatly signify. I have come on purpose to see Clive. Of course I know he is ill, but I need not be with him more than ten minutes. There is something of importance I wish to say.'

Violet already felt shocked at the havoc which grief and anxiety had wrought in Judith's appearance, but it was not until she heard her speak that the full extent of the change became manifest. Her voice, which used to be rich, was now so weak, hollow, and nerveless as to sound like that of a stranger.

'May I see him?' she asked, observing that Miss Winter looked grave.

'He is very ill,' said Violet, emphasizing the adjective. 'I had better tell you the truth. He has only a few weeks to live, and when your letter came, speaking of a visit, my father and I both decided it would be dangerous to let you talk to him. But Rosny overheard our conversation, and went to the invalid's room with the news. This altered everything. Clive says he wishes to see you, and we have no choice in the matter.'

'I shall not hurt him,' said Judith. 'He will be glad to hear the little I have to say. But it may be better that I should understand his exact condition?'

For the first time Violet recognised the practical Judith of former days, and answered without reserve.

'He is dying of consumption; but just now his trouble is increased by water on the chest. Don't let him speak a word more than needful.'

'I will take care,' said Judith. 'I promise not to stay more than ten minutes; but I should like to be quite alone with him.'

Then she was left by herself, and waited, for what seemed an interminable time, while Violet went upstairs. At last came the summons.

.

The sick-room was wonderfully still. One window had been left open, and the sea could be heard breaking on the shore a quarter of a mile away. Clive was raised up in bed on a bank of pillows, and breathed with great difficulty. He looked inquiringly at his cousin, but left her to begin conversation.

'I have come to tell you something of importance,' she said, 'something which I hope will not

excite you, or wake recollections that are painful. That letter to Aunt Winter——'

She stopped, adding, after a silence of half a minute: 'There was time to have given it if—if I had chosen.'

Two red patches of colour flew into Clive's pale cheeks, but he said not a syllable.

'I want to give back the money I received,' continued Judith. 'If you will allow me to keep a little for my mother's use as long as she lives, I shall be glad. Two hundred a year is enough, and, of course, it must return to you on her death. I shall explain to the others—Fidelia, and Lancelot, and the rest. What they may do I cannot tell. That is a question for themselves. My part is clear. I return the whole legacy.'

She spoke rapidly, taking care not to look at Clive, and feeling her shame increase with each word, until, at last, surprised by his persistent silence, she ventured on a glance, only to become aware that he was not observing her in the least. His eyes were gazing, as it seemed, into remote distances.

'Have I made myself clear?' she asked. 'You have understood?'

He nodded; then said, with a huge effort: 'The money is of no use to me.'

'But it is yours. I possess no claim, no real claim; it is every bit yours. Your mother would have left it to you if she had known you were living.'

He shook his head. 'I don't want it.'

The words were quite distinct, though uttered with enormous difficulty.

'There is Rosny,' exclaimed Judith.

Clive fought hard for breath, until suddenly relief came.

'Ah!' he said, his colour returning. 'That's right! For the moment I have air. Rosny doesn't need more money. He is to live with Violet; he will do very well.'

'But it is yours; I cannot possibly keep it. You must, indeed, take it back.'

'If it were a great estate, I should think so. This is just enough to go to the devil with, and no more. Rosny is clever. He can work; and he will have a fine start. Uncle Roderick has promised to educate him, and to leave him something besides. I have a little to leave; he will get between seven and eight hundred a year.'

Judith remained dumb.

'I don't want Rosny to be ruined,' the choking voice went on. 'I was ruined just in that way. I

had no chance—plenty of money, no home, no responsibility. He is safe here ; Violet loves him. She's the right kind of woman for a boy. Of course he will go to school in time, and her brothers will advise her if she needs advice. She loves him, that's the chief point.'

A fit of coughing cut short further words, and when it was ended he lay exhausted on his pillows.

'I had better go,' said Judith. 'I have done no good. Only I wanted to tell you, and get rid of the money.'

'Not by giving it to me. I had rather be without. But you were right to confess, though I cannot say I am surprised ; I felt pretty sure things hadn't been square. It is all over now. A surgeon is coming from London to-morrow, and I shall get rid of this weight on my chest. Would you open the window an inch wider ?'

Judith did as she was asked.

'What time is it ?'

'Half-past six.'

'Ah, the night's coming on. When I dread night, I wish I were a beggar sleeping on straw, or a prisoner in a cell, if only I could breathe without pain. Give me a mouthful of air ; don't offer me money—it isn't worth while.'

Tears rushed into Judith's eyes and choked her voice.

'Oh, how I wish there was anything I could do for you ! I am so sorry, so ashamed.'

'No one can do much,' said Clive. 'This man from London may help me a little. It can't last long. I have been a great fool. If I had my life to live over again I should work it out differently.'

He had managed to pull himself up on his right arm, and his eyes, covered with a dim haze, met hers beseechingly.

'There is something I can do,' she said ; ' tell me—what is it ?'

His expression gave her new courage. Perhaps he had suddenly remembered some purpose to which the money could be applied, and she might rid herself of the burden. But these hopes proved vain. His thoughts were entirely taken up with the physical needs of the moment.

'There's a wine-glass on the table beside you. Could you hold it for me ?'

When she did this he swallowed two small mouthfuls with immense difficulty, then fell heavily on the bank of pillows.

'I cannot bear to tease you,' faltered Judith, with

a sob in her voice, ‘but this money hangs like a weight round my neck. Do, please, take it from me. If Rosny is not to inherit, surely you can think of some other way?’

‘I can’t carry it where I am going,’ said Clive, staring into vacancy.

‘Then bequeath it to a friend. Is there no one who would be better for it?’

‘I haven’t time,’ he whispered, ‘nor strength. Besides, I don’t know a single soul who deserves it from me. Violet has plenty. There are hospitals; but you can give charity as well as I. I am tired. This must do, I think.’

Judith put her hand gently on the bed-coverings in token of leave-taking, and he understood and looked up at her.

‘It was more than half my fault, so don’t waste time repenting. I can’t complain of my mother not having read that letter, because, in the first place, it came several years too late, and in the second it wouldn’t have pleased her. She and I were too unlike ever to agree.’

‘But she loved you,’ said Judith, impelled by honesty.

‘Yes, as long as she didn’t see me,’ replied Clive. ‘That was the worst of it. We both loved each

other, only, whenever we met, we seemed forced to nag and quarrel. Well, it is over now.'

A warning rap sounded at the door ; ten minutes had gone. Judith knew there must be no fuss, no agitation, no lingering on the threshold, and went quickly away. As she passed out the nurse came in, and Clive's voice was immediately heard, saying anxiously : ' Could you change my position ? I want to get back again. I am tired of being raised up like this.'

Then, for the first time, Judith realised the absolute folly of offering fifty thousand pounds to a man who would gladly have given every sovereign he owned for a single hour's relief from pain.

CHAPTER XVII

GENERAL WINTER was in the drawing-room when Judith went downstairs, and greeted her with his customary coldness, softened somewhat, on this occasion, by the fact of her recent sorrow. Rosny, pale and large-eyed as usual, was playing with a number of toy soldiers in a recess near one of the windows.

‘How have you found Clive?’ said Violet. ‘Not coughing much, I hope?’

‘He is very ill,’ said Judith. ‘I don’t think I was prepared for the change, though you tried to prepare me. And he has refused the request I came to make. I wanted to give back the money I received through his mother’s will.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the General, thinking he had heard wrongly. ‘Am I to understand you offered Clive money?’

‘I offered to return my whole legacy,’ said Judith, ‘only asking for an annuity of two hundred pounds for my mother. I feel sure Aunt Winter would have

wished her to have that ; but he declines to receive any portion of the money, either for Rosny or himself.'

'He has done right,' said the General, glancing at his daughter ; 'Rosny is well provided for.'

Rosny, hearing his own name, left his soldiers and came to his uncle's knee.

'Go to your play, little man,' said the General, stroking his head. 'Don't leave your army unprotected ! Who knows what may happen ?'

Rosny gave Judith an uneasy, questioning look, as if she were the enemy he most feared, before returning to his toys. Judith held out her hand to Violet, anxious only to end the visit. She made sure that Clive would tell them of her falseness, and explain the whole occurrence directly she had gone, therefore the sooner this interview was over the better for every one. Those hard lines in General Winter's face did not invite a longer stay. The truth was, that he suspected her honesty from the first, and, as he could not help showing his suspicion, a terrible consciousness of guilt used to come over her whenever they met, making her manner harder and more flippant with him than with any other person. In consequence he had formed the lowest opinion of her character, and

it annoyed him that she and his daughter should even be on terms of ordinary friendliness.

‘Why need you hurry away?’ said Violet, gently. ‘I hoped you would dine with us. At all events, come to my room for a few minutes and rest.’

Violet was such a loving creature that her very lightest touch seemed like a kiss.

‘I must go,’ said Judith; ‘I have tried to do what seemed right, but you see I have not succeeded. There is no use in lingering.’

Alone with Violet she would certainly, in that hour of bitter humiliation, have given utterance to some of the thoughts burning at her heart; but the sight of General Winter compelled her to keep silence. He represented the scorn of the world—the disgust of all honourable men and women—for a girl who had lied and deceived in order to get a legacy of fifty thousand pounds.

‘I will walk as far as the hotel with you,’ said Violet. ‘Wait five minutes while my cloak is brought.’

‘My dear, you have walked already further than usual to-day,’ interposed her father. ‘The carriage can take Miss Hermann to the hotel.’

‘I had rather go alone,’ said Judith, turning very pale. ‘The distance is a trifle.’

She bent her head to the General, who rang the bell and held the door open, with some commonplace words of leave-taking, when Rosny suddenly came forward.

'Here is a shell I picked up on the shore,' he said, 'the largest of all my shells. Would you like to have it?'

'I shall like it immensely,' said Judith, feeling as if the gift were in some mysterious way a cup of cold water.

'Perhaps I can find you a few more,' added Rosny. 'That one is partly pink. Do you like pink shells best? If you do, I will look for them.'

He went back to his corner, and no one but Violet guessed the reason of this rapid change of behaviour to a visitor who at first had roused his apprehension. She knew he had seen tears in Judith's eyes.

'Do you suppose Miss Hermann really offered to make Clive a present of her fortune?' said the General to his daughter, as soon as the front door closed.

'I am sure she did,' said Violet.

'It is remarkably strange, then. What can all this mean?'

'I think,' said Violet, speaking in a very low voice, and glancing at Rosny, 'that it means she has

been suffering from agony of conscience. You thought things looked very doubtful at the time, and no other explanation can account for such a step. Her whole fortune ! '

' Perhaps she first made sure Clive wouldn't accept the present, and then suggested it to win good opinions and reinstate herself with us all. If so, she is a very clever young woman, who has overshot her mark.'

' You do not believe in the possibility of a soul's tragedy ? ' said Violet reproachfully.

' No, my dear,' said the General. ' I should say, judging from the experience of seventy-six years, that those are very uncommon. Most people's souls are too light, or too small, or too doughy to suffer tragedies, and I distrust every word that girl says. She is handsome, but somehow her good looks are no advantage to her. I did not like several things Herbert told me, and the way she treated Denis was disgraceful. Waiting for a higher offer, I suppose, before she closed with his.'

' She looked shockingly sad to-day,' said Violet.
' Her brother's death has been a terrible grief.'

' I don't accuse her of being without natural feeling,' remarked the General, ' but—— oh, well, I don't happen to like her, that's all.'

The next morning Judith rose up, after a sleepless, miserable night, and frightened Miss Felkin by saying she meant to go back to London immediately. Tired as she was, there could be no rest for her in the neighbourhood of the Winters'. So resolute did she show herself that contradiction was impossible, and everything was prepared for the return journey. Just as they were ready to start a messenger came bringing a letter. It was directed in Violet's handwriting, and Judith, who had looked for no communication, opened it with terrible sinkings of the heart. She soon saw her correspondent was Clive, to whom Violet only acted as amanuensis :

‘MY DEAR COUSIN,—I hope you will not repeat a word of our conversation yesterday. I never shall. Words cost me a great deal now—too much to be at the pain of saying unnecessary ones.

‘CLIVE WINTER.’

In a few lines Violet explained that he had insisted on dictating the note before his operation, though she entreated him to wait. ‘Suppose I die,’ he had said. ‘But there is more for him to suffer,’ wrote Violet. ‘The end will not be yet.’ Then she expressed her deep sympathy for Judith, and her

hope that they might meet before long, and ‘be friends,’ as children say, with one another.

‘What has happened?’ cried Miss Felkin. ‘You are ill! Let me open the window.’

‘I am a little faint,’ said Judith, ‘that’s all. And perhaps you are right, I had better not travel to-day. If I could go upstairs and rest, quite alone, it might be wisest.’

Miss Felkin was only too thankful to postpone their journey. She made the necessary arrangements, and before long Judith found herself alone, just as she wished to be, in a little dark, quiet room. Once again her destiny had been decided by forces beyond her control. Her fortune was still her own, in consequence of the determined refusal of a dying man to accept it, either for himself or his heir. Her reputation remained as before; suspicion might, indeed, lurk in the minds of a few, but in the sight of the world her character showed without stain.

No doubt her nerves were disordered. Instead of rejoicing at this deliverance, she could not divest herself of a feeling that in some strange way the money was alive while linked to her, and would work more mischief yet, unless she destroyed its existence by shaking herself free.

‘It was the money kept me from Ludovic,’ were

her first words, when, at the end of an hour, Miss Felkin returned to see how she was getting on.

‘Oh, my dear, try to forget.’

‘I can’t; I am forced to think of it all the time. I never can be at rest until I have cast off the burden of that money.’

‘These are fancies—the fancies of a sick person. You will see everything differently when you are well. Money brings power to do good. But it is easily disposed of. You could give it away in your lifetime.’

‘I could try,’ said Judith, starting up in feverish haste; ‘but what is the good? I shall be prevented—mark my words—I shall be prevented. That money is mine; it will stick to me, and I shall never be allowed to get rid of it, until I die.’

CHAPTER XVIII

‘It is so incredibly selfish of Judith,’ said Bertha. ‘She lives wrapped up in herself. How much happier her life might be if she now and then gave a thought to my children! And they are so affectionate! Only to-day George said, “Why did Aunt Judy forget to send me a present on my birthday?” His eyes were full of tears. He has a loving heart—that child.’

‘I think, my dear,’ said Mrs. Hermann, ‘that you should remind George his Aunt was very good to him while she was well and happy. Now she is ill, and it becomes his turn to take thought for her, and not expect presents until she feels able to drive about again.’

‘Such a trifling exertion!’ said Bertha. ‘But I see how it is. My children must look to strangers for kindness. And then the more serious matter, that Judith should refuse—actually *refuse*—to send money for my husband’s return voyage, when her

fortune is so large she cannot spend a quarter of it ! Just think of the incongruity. An unmarried woman, with no one in the world to consider but herself, and an income of two thousand pounds ; while I, who have three children and a husband, can scarcely make ends meet. Oh, how selfish she is ! '

Mrs. Hermann bent over her sewing to hide her crimson cheeks. In her work-box lay a letter from Victor, advising her to counsel Judith on no account whatever to further her brother-in-law's return home. ' He only wants to idle about and sponge on the heiress of the family,' wrote Victor. ' If he cannot pay his own passage back, what good will he be to Bertha or the children ? '

' You might say something, mother,' cried Bertha. ' You always seem to take part with Judith.'

' I often wish,' said Mrs. Hermann, ' that Judith would marry and have children of her own. Then her money would cease to be a source of envy and contention.'

' It is not kind to say that,' said Bertha ; ' I am never envious. And can I help being anxious that my poor children should have some chances in life ? Lately you have grudged everything I did for them.'

Mrs. Hermann cried at this remark, and then

tried to conceal her tears, because she did not wish the Imp to see them, or to know that grown-up people quarrelled, occasionally, just like little ones. After a while the two unhappy women made peace, retracted hasty words, and kissed each other.

' You shouldn't speak as if we were poor,' said Mrs. Hermann. ' I can recall the day when five hundred a year would have seemed great wealth to both of us.'

' Compare it with two thousand ! ' said Bertha.

' With fifteen hundred, my dear. This gift to me makes Judith's income less.'

' Well, with fifteen hundred. Every one thinks Judith ought to make a better provision for us. Here are the boys needing education, and their father imploring me to send money to bring him home. He can't believe I am not able to do as he asks—"With so much money in the family," he says.'

' But the money is not in the family,' said Mrs. Hermann ; ' it belongs to Judith. And, remember, she has sent remittances for the children's education, quite apart from the allowance she makes me. We must have had seven hundred last year, if all were added up.'

' Well, you may be sure she has not missed it,' said Bertha. ' When you see her, state my case

strongly. Say I shall die of heart-break unless something is done to help me.'

'Judith wrote this morning,' said Mrs. Hermann; 'she wishes me to go at once to London, on important business. I cannot imagine what it may be. Miss Felkin adds in a private note that I must prepare to feel astonished.'

'I believe she is going to marry,' cried Bertha, changing colour. 'That is the explanation, you may depend. Well, when everything's said, I comfort myself by thinking I had rather have my lot than hers.'

'Surely that is a selfish thing to do,' thought the Imp, with a pang.

He was fond of his mother, and liked to consider her perfect, but this speech jarred on his sense of righteousness.

The following day Mrs. Hermann set off on her journey, much disquieted as to the probable effect of a talk with Judith, whom she had not seen for more than six weeks. It was a relief to find Miss Felkin in attendance at the station, and learn that her daughter's mental condition was at all events no worse than when she left Rivington. Judith met them on the stairs of the hotel which was now her resting-place, looking wonderfully pale, and dressed in black

from head to foot, without a single ornament. The bedroom she had chosen for her mother was large and comfortable ; a great contrast to her own.

‘ Shall you mind dining downstairs ? ’ she asked.
‘ We always do—there are separate tables.’

‘ I don’t mind anything,’ said Mrs. Hermann, to whom the prospect of seeing a *table d’hôte* was at first rather amusing.

When, half an hour later, she followed her daughter into the crowded dining-room and saw her winding her way, past many observers, to their own corner, matters assumed a different aspect. The absence of colour and jewellery only showed Judith’s beauty to more striking advantage, and several eyes clearly expressed their approval.

‘ Isn’t this hotel life a little trying ? ’ said Mrs. Hermann ; ‘ it is so public. I feel as if I were under a burning glass.’

‘ Oh, I never notice any one,’ replied Judith. ‘ I have given up the house I had, because it was expensive.’

‘ But you might have private lodgings.’

‘ I should tire of Miss Felkin,’ whispered Judith, as if confessing a guilty secret. ‘ I tire of every one. *Têtes-à-tête* are shocking things. She amuses herself by looking at the different groups and inventing

stories about them. When I know she is happy, I am absolved from effort. Here she comes. Speak of something else.'

Miss Felkin's modest little figure glided into the room, and Mrs. Hermann remarked that whereas Judith knew no one, the companion had already several acquaintances who greeted her with smiles and nods. After dinner it became evident that Judith did not allow herself a private sitting-room, for a fire was burning in her mother's bedroom, and there they adjourned for a talk.

' My dear child,' said Mrs. Hermann, ' is it wise to treat yourself as if you were of no consequence ? Miss Felkin is a good creature, but even the best people are better for being treated according to their position. As a rule, they feel more secure and comfortable when that is so. The other plan suggests caprice.'

' You mean that she has the largest room,' said Judith. ' I make that arrangement because the one who sleeps in the principal room must share it with boxes. I object to the company of leather boxes.'

Mrs. Hermann recognised some evasion, and said no more.

' I heard from Victor last week,' continued Judith.

'Oh, how thankful I am!' cried her mother.
'Now the responsibility is taken from me.'

'I want to ask one or two questions,' said Judith.
'Don't look so distressed. They are very simple ones.
Does James Watts harass Bertha for money? That
is the first question. And the second is this: Do you
pay the children's school fees out of your own purse?'

'I can't help it,' said Mrs. Hermann; 'poor
Bertha is worried to death. The last time you sent
a cheque she needed some money for her husband,
and of course—well, I couldn't see her in trouble,
and not do my utmost to put things straight.'

'But you promised me that the income I provided
was to be spent on yourself alone. I did not dare to
make it larger, because I knew James Watts would
annoy you if he thought there was any to spare.
When you had only five hundred a year, it seemed to
me, decency would keep him silent.'

'He is so poor!' said Mrs. Hermann.

'I have sent Bertha a cheque every month. Is it
possible that all has gone to her worthless husband—
and that you have educated and clothed the children
from the very first?'

Mrs. Hermann made no reply, and Judith, after
waiting in vain for the assurance she wished, rose
hastily from her chair.

‘While I thought I was helping *you* I have been keeping James Watts in idleness, it seems. Do you think I can make the discovery and not feel hurt?’

Mrs. Hermann looked piteously at her daughter.

‘You would have acted as I have done in my place,’ she said. ‘It was to keep the peace. Bertha has been very sensitive lately. She takes offence at the merest trifles. I can’t blame her. But I have gone through a great deal. It is not only Ludovic’s death which has made me look so ill and old. Sometimes I scarcely know what I am saying. And a dispute seems too terrible to bear. I really hoped you wouldn’t mind what I did with the money, Judith. It never struck me you would be so vexed.’

‘I am not vexed,’ cried Judith, putting her arms round her mother’s neck. ‘I am only disappointed to find I did not know how to make you happy. Now listen to my proposal. I want you to take my whole fortune, every farthing of it, and go out to Victor. He will help and advise as to the way it should be spent and . . .’

‘Not for worlds!’ said Mrs. Hermann. ‘Oh, my dear, don’t speak of such a thing. I should be worried to death. I can’t understand money. I never could. Consider my position. I am an old

woman. I only wish to end my days quietly. If you, with all your natural business capacity and strong will, cannot keep James Watts in his place, how do you expect *me* to do it? He would hang upon me like a leech, and poor Bertha would take his part, and Victor might get angry. Victor is angry already. His last letter hurt me a good deal. He says I have changed to him.'

'Is that the reason of your altered looks?' said Judith, quickly. 'Now I understand everything.'

'It hurt me,' said Mrs. Hermann. 'I confess it hurt me. But there's no use in talking.'

'How sickening the whole matter becomes!' said Judith, after a pause. 'I shall dispose of my property before I die. There are charities crying for money, and I can tie up a sum for each of the children, Victor's and Bertha's, and give you still as much as you care to have.'

'You are not in earnest,' said her mother: 'you cannot be. Think of all the quarrelling, if the money were distributed now. James would be angry because nothing was left to him, and make Bertha more miserable than ever. Even Victor would not like an arrangement which provided for his sons and brought him and his wife no benefit. Oh, keep the money, and marry as soon as you can! Directly you have

children of your own no one can look for another sovereign, except as a matter of pure gratuitous kindness. To be the only rich person in a poor family is to live the life of a dog ! '

' It is indeed,' said Judith, with a reckless little laugh. ' And the pity of it is that I am not rich, as the world counts riches. People quarrel over six-pences just as fiercely as if they were bank-notes. Doesn't it seem ghastly to lose our souls for such absurd remuneration ? If some great stake were involved one might feel less despicable. But, great or small, what signifies, when the end is the same—ruin.'

' I don't understand you,' said Mrs. Hermann, nervously.

' Fifty thousand pounds ! ' continued Judith. ' Was it worth the trouble ? I never cared much for Bertha, and her husband is personally odious to me. But I love you, though, and I like the Imp a little. So I was forced to help Bertha in order to help you. And now she hates me, and her husband reviles me, and you are unhappy, and the poor little Imp I expect does not live in clover ; and I—well, I am the most wretched creature at this moment in London. That's the end of the whole dismal story.'

' You terrify me,' said Mrs. Hermann. ' I wish

I had not repeated a syllable. But Victor wrote to you himself.'

'Of course he did. My wretchedness is not caused by anything you have told me. Oh no, I am responsible for all. Unless, indeed, I am responsible for nothing, and we are puppets in the hands of Destiny. Do you remember the day Aunt Winter called on us? She might have been one of the Fates herself, with her waxen features and mysterious eyes. Her eyes always seemed to look over people's heads, as if she saw something no one else could see just behind them. I simply *had* to go with her. It was a foregone conclusion. And Lu had to go to South America. Every circumstance was inevitable. Is life always like that—horribly inevitable?'

'Perhaps it is,' said Mrs. Hermann. 'I know when they were cross with me for marrying your poor father I felt I had very little choice in the matter. Everything that happened seemed to give me a push, and always in the same direction, towards marriage, and marriage with him. But there is no use in talking. We are here, and must make the best of such circumstances as we have.'

'And that is the only important point,' cried Judith. 'You have put it in a nutshell. My cir-

cumstances under some one else's management might have grown into quite a different story; a very improving one, no blots or scratchings out, and not even the suspicion of a tragedy. So I am responsible after all, and need not quarrel with the Fates.'

'I cannot see why you blame yourself,' said her mother. 'Up to this time you have been perfect. Mr. Smith thinks you manage your responsibilities so well. He owns he was surprised.'

'What would he say if I washed my hands quite clean and endowed several hospitals with my money?'

'You don't mean it!' said Mrs. Hermann, looking terrified.

'What harm would it do?'

'They have all behaved very badly; at least James has. And Bertha may have vexed you. But such a terrible punishment as this. You cannot really mean to do it, Judith. The world would say you were mad.'

'The world must say what it pleases.'

'But not now. You don't mean you would give your fortune away now?'

'As soon as the forms can be run through. I shall reserve only an annuity for you. My first idea was to place the whole in your hands, but you refuse to accept it, and on second thoughts I feel sure you

do right to refuse. The money would cause you nothing but wretchedness.'

There was a brief silence. Mrs. Hermann rose and walked to the window, pretending to gaze out. When she came back to Judith her face looked very drawn and grey. A conviction that her daughter's mind was unhinged had taken fast hold of her during those minutes, and the troubles of which she had complained so recently now seemed unworthy of notice; mere pin-pricks in face of this great calamity.

'My dear child,' she said in a low voice, 'don't suppose I want to interfere in your affairs, or to change your plans for any selfish motive of my own. Only let me beg you to postpone your decision for a year.'

'I cannot. I am on fire till it is over and done. Besides, next year things will be just as they are now.'

'Not quite. The children will be twelve months older. James may have found work. Bertha will have had time to grow reconciled to the idea of living as she did before. And you, my Judith, may have discovered that your Aunt's money is necessary for your own comfort as well as theirs. How do you think you can exist without it?'

‘That is a question for myself to decide.’

‘In a year,’ added her mother, ‘I may be dead, beyond the reach of angry words. If you love me, Judith, wait twelve months from to-day.’

‘This is the sixth of October,’ said Judith. ‘I promise to wait. Before the time is over I may have found a refuge for you as well as for myself. You would come and live with me, wouldn’t you? If I ever contrive a home where things are paid for honestly, you will promise to share it? Then you would not hear the angry words. We might be happy together in a quiet, wintry way. Do say you will come. It cuts me to the heart to see you unhappy. Do promise to come.’

‘Yes; I promise to come. Now lie down, dear child, and try to rest.’

‘There are two things more I must tell you. Miss Felkin is going to leave me. She has her legacy, and can make herself perfectly comfortable with a sister in Brighton.’

‘Have you heard of a companion to fill her place?’

‘I don’t need a companion. I have arranged to spend next winter in Florence.’

‘*Alone!* It is out of the question.’

'It is what I mean to do, though, and there are no difficulties. I have friends there, who would see after me if I were ill. But I shall not be ill. Make your mind easy, dear mother ; and now let us go back to Miss Felkin.'

CHAPTER XIX

JUDITH carried her point, and went to Florence unattended, in spite of the opposition of all her friends. They little guessed that the money for her expenses was procured by the sale of Lady Winter's jewels. These had been given to her several weeks before her aunt died, so she considered them lawfully her own, and felt glad when the sum they realised proved large. Her chief motive in going to Florence was to see a professional singer named Madame Hart, whose acquaintance she had made accidentally in the course of travels with Miss Felkin. This lady was now in delicate health, but her interest in teaching continued long after her public career closed, and she responded readily to Judith's request for weekly lessons. It happened that Hermann and she had been thrown together for a short time, just when his fortunes were at their highest, so she knew the family tradition, and was by no means surprised that one of his children should wish to study music.

'I want to have a profession ; to feel that I could support myself and give my mother a home, even if my money were suddenly to melt away,' explained Judith. 'Once I thought of the stage. I might have danced instead of singing, if they had seen fit to allow me. It is too late for that career now.'

Madame Hart nodded with sympathy. She believed that the artist nature cannot be restrained ; that sooner or later it breaks the chain parental cowardice winds round it, and chooses voluntarily the path of self-denial and joy. With these ideas, it never struck her as the least bit odd that an heiress like Judith should find existence dull, and hunger for the full expression of her faculties. Nevertheless, as days went by, even her enthusiasm was forced to admit that Hermann's daughter could never hope to win any real success as a singer.

'I might give lessons,' Judith suggested timidly.

'Oh yes, you could give lessons and sing in drawing-rooms. Your voice is excellent within its range, but then the range is small. What a mercy you can enjoy your gift, without feeling the dire necessity of earning daily bread press upon you at every turn !'

The day Judith heard this verdict she climbed up to San Miniato and tried to conquer her dis-

appointment and sense of affront by looking at the long range of Apennines in the evening light. Madame Hart had deferred giving judgment, not because her own mind was doubtful, but because her pupil seemed enjoying the lessons, and she never dreamt they were undertaken except for enjoyment. March was nearly over, and five months of the year of waiting had gone.

Circumstances were all against her, but Judith's nature was much too practical to take discouragement heavily. She remembered how often her father had missed pleasures which came in his way, because he persisted in pining for the unattainable, and resolved, if she could, to bear the strokes of fate in stronger fashion. She and Mr. Smith were at one as regards the wisdom of taking the second best cheerfully when the first best is beyond reach. To live in England, while giving music lessons, would probably prove impossible, because people might consider her a dangerous person, eccentric almost to the verge of madness. Her thoughts now centred round Vienna, where Madame Hart had connections who would recommend her. Surely she could earn enough to keep herself in daily bread, and shelter her mother when existence under Bertha's roof became intolerable. Mrs. Hermann's annuity ought

to make her comfortable as long as life lasted, but Judith had a suspicion it would be consumed in paying bills for James Watts or his children. If this proved true, her own earnings must be relied upon for everything.

When tired of thought, she took Aubrey's last letter from her pocket and read it several times. His affection never swerved. He spoke happily about his work, and said he hoped to come to Florence in April, as he 'hungered and thirsted' to see her. Judith scarcely knew whether this tidings gave her pleasure or pain. All at once her solitude was invaded by two girls who sat down on the same seat, and she had scarcely time to put Aubrey's letter away before one exclaimed:—

'Oh, Constance, there is the man we used to see at Cannes. He is so distinguished-looking, I am sure he must be "somebody."'

'Very likely only an actor,' said Constance.

'Then I wish I could see him act,' returned the girl.

Judith cast a glance at the object of these remarks, and beheld the pale closely shaven face of Lancelot Wood. Their acquaintance had come to an untimely end the winter before, because, rightly or wrongly, she conceived the idea that her fortune was tempting him

to make her an offer. Just now, she would gladly have spared some of her fast-vanishing money to escape notice, but unluckily he caught sight of her, and followed as she walked quickly down hill in the direction of home.

‘Well met! Florence is a place where it isn’t good to be alone.’

‘Not as far as I am concerned,’ said Judith, candidly. ‘I came here on purpose to be alone.’

‘You are never very kind to me, are you? That pleasant little speech stings my ears.’

‘Truth is best,’ replied Judith. ‘I am *not* glad to see you. Why should I pretend to be?’

‘At all events, try to endure my company for five minutes. I am bored to extinction; cross, ill, jaded. It would be a virtuous act to cheer me up.’

‘What have you been doing?’

‘Spending five weeks with the Staffords at Cannes.’

‘Oh yes; I heard they were there; Fidelia has been with them, surely.’

‘Fidelia made one of the party.’

‘It was remarkably ill-assorted.’

‘Don’t say that. There’s no need to say such things.’

‘But I am only speaking the truth.

‘No doubt, you have a terrible habit of speaking the truth. Tell falsehoods for a change.’

‘You stayed five weeks, then, at Cannes?’

‘I did—— and came here to recruit.’

‘He must be very deeply in debt,’ thought Judith, ‘to “sorn” on such uncongenial people for five whole weeks.’

‘Miss Hermann.’

‘Yes.’

‘I am not sure that I can bear to tell you what I must tell you. I could still less bear that you should hear it from some one else’s lips.’

‘I am waiting to hear,’ said Judith, when the pause he made at the end of this sentence had lasted fully three minutes.

‘Will you believe me when I say I am going to marry——’

‘Of course I shall.’

‘You didn’t let me finish. To marry——’

‘Who?’

‘Fidelia.’

‘Oh, it is not possible!’ cried Judith, turning the colour of paper. ‘You are inventing a tale to frighten me. Quick! say it is not true. Say it is a bad joke. I will forgive you; only speak quickly.’

‘I cannot; it is true.’

‘But what are you doing this for? Lancelot—speak!’

Wood had grown as pale as herself, and the next utterance was long in coming.

‘I don’t know. I am a predestined fool, but I never dreamt of what I now see. My eyes must have been blinded.’

‘Fidelia wanted to be a friend to you,’ said Judith.
‘Oh, poor Fidelia! ’

At these words, so unlike those he expected, Lancelot struck his foot on the ground and gave a wild laugh.

‘Poor *Fidelia*! Well, perhaps you are right. She is to be pitied. But I imagined you were on the brink of expressing some pity for me.’

‘Why should I pity you?’ said Judith, with biting contempt. ‘You proposed to her of your own free will, I suppose.’

‘I suppose I did.’

‘Then what right have you to expect pity? If you regret the engagement, break it off. That has been done before now, and men have survived the infamy.’

‘I am not sure that I wish to break it off. You surprised me by the way in which you received the news, and inadvertently——’

‘You gave me a glimpse into your heart.’

‘Precisely.’

‘When was this engagement entered upon?’

‘Three weeks ago.’

Judith walked slowly on, and he kept pace.

‘I couldn’t have believed this of Fidelia,’ she said at last. ‘It is not a bit like her——’

‘Don’t insult me again,’ said Lancelot, angrily. ‘I have borne enough.’

‘Oh, I meant nothing. My opinion doesn’t matter.’

‘That is so like you! You stick a sword deep down into a man’s heart, and then tell him it doesn’t matter.’

‘I am ready to congratulate, if you give me leave.’

‘No, I had rather not be congratulated.’

They went a little farther, and then Judith stopped——

‘Good-bye. We had better separate.’

‘I am not ready to go yet,’ said Lancelot. ‘I am in burning pain. I was driven to do what I have done. You ought to understand.’

‘No honest man need be driven into marrying for money. Women are sometimes. God help them!’

‘How dare you say poverty was my motive? You insult me more than I can bear.’

‘I feel sure it was. Deny the charge if you can. What else could induce you to take a step which is regretted already?’

‘I was a fool,’ repeated Lancelot. ‘A predestined fool. And life has been against me, at every corner hampered and hindered, until I scarcely know my right hand from my left. You, yourself, are to blame for what I have done.’

Judith shivered and stared at him.

‘Why do you think so? What can my share be in your misconduct?’

‘You drove me mad with contemptuous refusals and disdain. You fought against every attempt I made to be friends with you.’

‘Is that all you charge me with? I can sleep quietly beneath the accusation. Yes, I persistently shook you off, and I did right.’

‘Then, don’t call me a scoundrel for letting myself grow desperate. Here, our roads part. I will relieve you of my company.’

Judith bent her head and continued her way, but he stood still, looking after her. In another second she heard her name spoken.

‘Miss Hermann! Do you know that Clive is dead?’

He had attained his purpose. She stood still, and turned her eyes full on his face.

‘I have not heard a word. When did it happen?’

‘Two weeks ago. He has lingered on and on. Such horrors I never knew could exist before. Now, I feel sure they are always existing. Some poor devils must be expiring in hospitals while we talk. I had bad dreams for several nights after reading the letter from Violet.’

Judith shivered once or twice, though the afternoon was warm.

‘Clive’s wife still goes on. Nothing kills those who ought to die. Lucky for us, all the same, that she was alive, when he heard of his mother’s will. He would certainly have fought, if he had not been afraid of bringing her down upon him.’

‘That will do. I have heard enough.’

‘One other word.’

‘No, no. I beg you will leave me.’

‘But you are ill—faint. This twilight hour is unwholesome. I will come as far as the foot of the hill and find a carriage.’

‘I had much rather be alone, and I assure you I

am perfectly well. It would annoy me beyond measure if you took the least trouble on my account. Besides, it is unnecessary.'

Lancelot dared not venture farther, but long after her slender figure had disappeared he stood still, gazing in the direction she had taken.

CHAPTER XX

WHILE Judith was struggling to tear off the poisoned garment in which her own hands had entangled her, Fidelia's course had proved comparatively smooth. Mrs. Stafford, weary of her daughter's whims, insisted, after Lady Winter's death, that she should 'live like other people,' a phrase which may bear many meanings.

'I could never be happy if I spent my days in shopping and receiving callers,' Fidelia used to reply. 'I must feel I am doing real work ; work which will endure.'

It was with this aim that she cultivated the acquaintance of Lancelot, who happened just then to be in that state of idleness for which Satan always provides mischief. His circumstances were undoubtedly sad. He had tried a great many outlets for energy, and partially succeeded, partially failed in all. Life is very disconsolate to a man of thirty-

six, who has not yet found his métier, and has only money enough to pay for necessities. His early career had given grounds for hope. Both at school and college he was considered precociously clever, and the atmosphere of youth adhered to him for a long time after leaving the university. When his books, poems, and essays were praised, people used to add, ‘And then he is so very *young*,’ after the fashion George Eliot has described with such piquancy.

Unhappily for himself, this promise of rare ability never came to fulfilment. His productions always remained those of a clever boy, immature and uncertain, though lightened by flashes of wit. He grew painfully conscious that his good looks were on the wane, that his hair was getting thin on the top and splashed with grey at the tips, that younger men were pushing forward who classed him among antiquities. Youth is so audacious, so blatant, so stupidly blind to the fact that it will become Old Age before it has time to look round.

By degrees he lost elasticity under the burden of disappointment, growing each year more indolent, both in body and mind. There seemed no use in continuing to write, when his drawers were full of rejected manuscript. After leaving Oxford, he had eaten his dinners and been called to the Bar, but it

was too late now to begin to practise. He would have liked to represent some of his countrymen in Parliament, but lack of money checked this aspiration. At last a deadly sickness settled down upon him ; the sickness of Nothing to Do. He loathed the sight of his club, of the newspapers, of the food which was for ever the same, no new joint or bird being invented, of the faces of his fellow-pilgrims more than all. When Fidelia wrote inviting him to dine with the Staffords and herself, he went, from sheer vacuity, and, wonderful to relate, found his spirits exhilarated.

Even while she was a devotee he had never disliked Fidelia. It was impossible to dislike any one who listened to his conversation with so much interest. Once at Riverscourt she reminded him of a remark he had made quite three weeks previously. This settled the question. Fidelia henceforward, in his opinion, was an uncommonly intelligent woman, not devoid of personal charm. When they met after her change of views, he naturally thought her more agreeable than before. The peculiar attraction which had always belonged to her still existed, though she now talked like other people, and went freely into the world. No one ever discovered the exact cause of her attractiveness. Some asserted her eyes drew them to

her; others said the fascination belonged to her voice. A few imagined they discovered it in the faculty she possessed of giving her whole undivided attention to the person she was speaking with. Never, by any chance in her busiest days, did Fidelia convey the impression of ‘hurry.’

Whatever its origin may have been, this power of influencing others existed, and had to be taken into account even by those who could not endure her. During the last six months, instead of diminishing, it had greatly increased. There was a strange gentleness now in her manner, a wistful expression on her face. Lancelot actually plunged into confidences, as soon as they were alone, and confessed that his state of mind bordered on suicidal. Fidelia did not preach to him or smile with the air of a superior being. She said, ‘Oh, you must on no account lose hope. We know what you have accomplished in the past, and shall never cease expecting greater things in the future. All people with creative minds pass through periods of dulness. You need change, that’s all.’

‘But time is rushing,’ he replied. ‘And I despair of the age we live in. It is a thoroughly vulgar age. If a book or a poem is good, no one cares to read more than half. The rest they leave

for another day. If it is bad, it immediately flies through twenty editions.'

Now, if Fidelia had been that objectionable creature, a woman destitute of tact, she would have pointed out to her poor friend that every age, since the creation of the world, has been disappointing to those who live in it. Rubbish naturally has a tendency to float on the top. Genius ought to be content to swim in deep waters, and wait for the recognition which is sure to come. But she well understood that this consolation in his case would prove vain. He knew he was not a genius, and therefore there was no manner of use in waiting. His reward must be given now or never.

'I am not sure,' she said gently, 'that fame is worth striving for. Let each of us do our best and be patient, if that best falls short of our ideal. There are always a few to whom we speak, a chosen circle who are helped by what we say. Of course it is shocking to hear inferior things lauded to the skies. But keep up courage. Wrongs get righted at last. Do you remember Browning's lines about Verdi?—

When, at his worst opera's end,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths,
Where sits Rossini, patient in his stall.'

Fidelia was a truthful person, though a kind one.

She did not say which of the two musicians Lancelot resembled, and if he imagined she meant to compare him to Rossini, perhaps the fault was his, not hers. In either case the mistake was a happy one. He went home that evening and finished a magazine article which had hung fire for weeks and weeks. He finished it well, too. Of so much potency is a little encouragement.

Fidelia and her mother came to call upon him very shortly after, and asked him to stay a week in a house they had taken on the river. Of course he went. During these few days the intimacy grew. Fidelia talked to him about her change of opinions, and also about schemes she had for the improvement of social conditions.

'We have gone on wrong lines,' she said, 'and taught dogma when we should have taught conduct. When will people see that they are bound together by laws which make selfishness not only wrong but actually impossible? Alms-giving is absurd. It is justice we need, not charity. The only possible salvation for the world lies in the plan of co-operation.'

At the sound of this word her eyes always glowed. Lancelot cared for the doctrine of mutual support as little as for any of the doctrines she used to preach

in days gone by, but he liked her soft accents, and his seat on a deck chair, under a birch-tree, was particularly comfortable.

He never knew when the idea first occurred to him that her fortune might smooth the rough waters of this troublesome life. For a while it only simmered idly in his brain. Then creditors grew urgent, and money seemed more desirable than ever. Several times during the winter which followed his visit Fidelia and he met each other : always with a sense of good-fellowship and pleasant mutual understanding. When spring came, Mrs. Stafford, who was by no means unobservant, invited him to join their party at Cannes.

‘I cannot offer to pay his expenses, can I?’ she said to her daughter.

‘*Mother!*’ cried Fidelia, and vanished through the doorway.

‘No, no,’ said the Colonel, who was present. ‘I am sure the poor dog is deucedly hard up, but you can’t offer money. Women have no conception of delicacy in these matters.’

‘Well, I only asked,’ said Mrs. Stafford, sitting down to her writing-table.

Lancelot, fortunately beyond earshot of this conversation, came to Cannes, and three days after-

wards asked Fidelia to marry him. Her face at that moment was well worth a study. Surprise dominated every other feeling ; a joyful and yet awe-struck surprise, such as may be seen sometimes on the faces of the dying. Her whole existence hitherto had been one long process of dying, and when love and happiness suddenly came to her, she felt like the Pilgrim in Bunyan's allegory, who, while still far away from home, sees the heavenly city in a vision. Her first words were extremely naïve.

‘ Oh, Lancelot, say that again.’

He said it again ; greatly astonished, but words cost nothing.

‘ Do you really mean it ? ’

‘ Certainly I do.’

‘ Have you considered ? I am very unlike you. My life has been lived in darkness. You may find that our ways are dissimilar, that I weary you, that I am too sad.’

‘ Sadness is a thing which does not endure for ever,’ said Lancelot, forced to be lover-like, and almost surprised to find his part an easy one. Fidelia’s face looked lovely at that moment, and her slender reed-like figure seemed suddenly to resemble a young girl’s. Moreover, he found her very uncommon. His experience of women hitherto had

been widely different. They were usually ready enough to believe in admiration, and up to this moment he had never thought it possible that any daughter of Eve (under thirty-five and conscious of possessing two thousand a year) could be surprised when a man made her an offer.

That night, for the first time, Fidelia regretted her lost belief. She would have liked to thank God for this sudden, unexpected, almost bewildering joy. The next day her happiness continued, but Lancelot found his position more constrained than at first. He understood better what she meant by saying they were widely different. Change her opinions as much as she pleased, Fidelia still remained the same. It was always Fidelia ; no one else. She was now fully as eager for the advance of Socialism as she had once been about the progress of Church doctrine, and her conscientiousness kept pace with her ideality. No sooner had her brain conceived an idea than she struggled to bring it into concrete shape ; and ideas, as Lancelot well knew, may be explosive when treated seriously. Absolutely conscientious she was not. No human being can be and continue to live. This is what we mean when we say people are usually better than their creeds.

He tried hard to act the character he had

assumed, but each day it grew more difficult. For one thing, she did not always look as beautiful as she had done when he first made love to her among laurel-bushes. Then his restless brain set to work and asked what advantage her fortune would bring if he were expected to give away more than half to the Social Democrats.

Fortunately for her own peace, Fidelia did not exact much demonstration of love. When he tried to atone for his cold manners by presenting her with a costly engagement ring, she received the gift as a little girl might have done. If he went off for solitary rambles somewhat too often, she ascribed it to the poetic temperament, which always makes men moody and fond of being alone.

Mrs. Stafford was so pleased with the prospect of seeing her daughter ‘settled’ that she forgot to grumble at Lancelot, either for being impecunious or for being cold.

‘Any marriage must be better than living as Fidelia has lived,’ she said one day to her husband. ‘Formerly I used to dread a Sisterhood, but just lately I have wished she were safely under lock and key inside one. Isn’t it a mercy Lancelot wants to be married in church?’

‘Where else could he be married?’

‘Oh, in a registrar’s office, or nowhere at all. Since Fidelia gave up being High Church her views on the marriage question have become perfectly wild. She says people shouldn’t be bound to each other after love has gone.’

‘That’s not a bad idea,’ said the Colonel. ‘There’s a good deal to be said for it—there’s a good deal to be said for most ideas. Only Fidelia would get the worst of it, if marriage could be dissolved at pleasure.’

‘It is a monstrous idea,’ replied his wife; ‘I wonder you can laugh !’

‘Poor Fidelia !’ said the Colonel. ‘She is peculiar, but a good creature all the same. I hope Wood will treat her well. Poor Fidelia !’

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN, at the end of five weeks, Lancelot escaped into Italy, it was agreed that the Staffords should follow before long and spend Easter with him in Florence. Fidelia was pleased with the prospect of seeing Judith again. She wished to pour out her tale of happiness, and defend Lancelot's character to one who had persistently misunderstood him. Mrs. Stafford, on the contrary, had no desire to become better acquainted with her niece.

'The drawback to Florence is the meeting it entails with that odious girl,' she remarked. 'Her behaviour is sure to be insufferable.'

'Judith is a good deal changed,' replied Fidelia, 'and sympathetic to me; she always was. I shall enjoy talking to her.'

'If you take my advice, you will keep as far away from her as possible,' replied Mrs. Stafford.

Fidelia never took her mother's advice. They reached Florence late one evening, and the very next

morning she drove to her cousin's *pension* on the unfashionable side of the Arno, and surprised her while practising scales in a hideous little *salon*.

'Why did you come to a place like this?' cried Fidelia. 'It is so stuffy and third-rate. I expected you would be on the Lung' Arno. And how pale you look! It is no wonder; this situation cannot be healthy.'

'Oh, my own room is better,' said Judith. 'Let us go there.'

Fidelia thought the bedroom as dismal as the *salon*; but she forebore remark, and sitting down on a blue and yellow sofa, they prepared to talk.

'I have an astounding piece of news,' she began; 'you will never guess what it is.'

The blush which covered her thin cheeks made her look ten years younger.

'Such a wonderful development has come to my life: one I never dreamt of.'

'I know—I met him—he has told me.'

'He has? Oh, I wish I had been the first to speak of it! Were you surprised, Judith?'

'A little—yes.'

'I don't wonder; I was surprised myself. It has all come about so strangely, and it makes me feel a child again. I forget I am thirty-three.'

‘He is thirty-six.’

‘Oh yes; but men don’t count their years as we do, and he has the gift of perpetual youth.’

Judith moved impatiently, but suppressed the reply which her lips longed to utter.

‘How strange it is!’ continued Fidelia. ‘I begin to feel new fellowship with the happy people, who seemed like foreigners to me before. I used to enjoy looking at them and hearing them talk, but I never wanted to be intimate, or to stay in their houses. We had nothing in common, and I felt ashamed they should discover the depths of my poverty. Now it is different. Even that frivolous Trixy Weston—one of Mother’s cronies—whom I always ran away from, has drawn to me and I to her. They see I am changed.’

‘Yes; there is a great change.’

‘And I don’t feel so far from you. It was difficult before to realize we were of the same sex. Everything that makes up a woman’s destiny was cut out of my life. I often wondered why you liked to be with me. I seemed to myself a maimed, misshapen creature.’

‘Did you really feel like that?’ cried Judith. ‘You concealed it very cleverly. I thought you looked down upon all of us, and were fully satisfied with the sort of attention you had. Once only you said some-

thing which helped me to guess you had suffered, and that was on the day you came to tell me you had changed your opinions.'

'Very few of us reveal our whole hearts,' said Fidelia. 'Why should we? And I knew there were compensations. I have always had the power of drawing miserable people to me, and those who were tossed in their minds. Herbert used to say——; but all that is over. Love has widened my world.'

'Yes; it is a trick Love has.'

'You don't say you are pleased, though; you look almost sad. Have you had any new trouble, Judith?'

'Oh, my dear,' cried Judith, putting her hands on her cousin's shoulder, 'you will kill me, if you marry Lancelot. He is unworthy of you.'

'You never understood his nature,' said Fidelia. 'Love has changed him, as it changed me. He is nobler than when you were last together. Every week he becomes braver, stronger, more unselfish.'

'Oh, please don't talk in that way,' cried Judith, covering her ears; 'I cannot endure to hear you. He is as unstable as water, and will break your heart. Why are women made like this? Why do they look up to men who are not fit to be in their company for five minutes? It is pitiful!'

‘You do not know him,’ persisted Fidelia. ‘I cannot imagine how it is that you always look at his character through a distorted medium. Some one must have maligned him terribly.’

‘He maligned himself,’ said Judith. ‘I never believed he was exceptionally wicked, though he wished us all to think so. He is one of those miserable creatures who would like to pat their God on the back, that people may think them brave.’

‘Love has drawn him upwards,’ repeated Fidelia. She had winced a good deal under the lash of her cousin’s words, and it vexed her to think that the true history of the change in Lancelot could never be made plain to a third person. Judith might only mock, if the idea were suggested that it was her influence, hers—Fidelia’s—which had wrought this startling transformation.

‘You and I are totally unlike,’ she ventured to say timidly. ‘It has always been my ideal of perfect happiness to live with some one who depended upon me for everything. I like to give much better than to receive.’

‘If you mean that you like to save curs from drowning,’ said Judith, ‘I am with you. I like doing that too; though I admit I have not searched for opportunities. But, in the matter of a husband,

things are different. My choice would fall on some one who could swim.'

It often happened that Judith wounded her cousin's self-esteem just where she was most sensitive, by veiled ridicule, which could never be openly answered or turned aside. Influencing the minds of others had been the great pleasure of Fidelia's life, ever since she realized, as a girl, that the ordinary ways by which women make their power felt were shut off from one so devoid of outward charm. And now Judith spoke as if she had done nothing worth doing—only saved a few mongrels who would have been better beneath water.

'I don't want to argue,' she said wearily; 'I hoped you would have given me sympathy, especially as you own that love has a power of changing things which seemed irrevocable. What motive but love could induce Lancelot to wish to marry me?'

'*Poverty*,' said Judith, between her teeth; and Fidelia started as if she had been shot.

There was a horrid silence, which lasted two or three minutes before either of them spoke.

'I am not wounded,' said Fidelia, at last; 'I believe in him still—not in my own powers of attraction, remember; those I estimate as humbly as you. But in him I believe, and when he tells me I have

touched something in his nature which has slept until now, I know he is speaking the truth. It seems extraordinary to you, of course, that a creature such as I am should win the love of a man so richly endowed, a man whom numbers praise and admire. But there is no use quarrelling with facts ; I am loved, and by him. Let this end our conversation.'

There was wonderful dignity in the tones of her quiet voice. She showed no anger, no excitement, no vindictiveness—passing over the implied insult to herself as if it were a thing of no consequence at all.

'I could never be surprised at a good man loving you,' said Judith ; 'the whole world would love you if you were revealed to it in your noblest moods—those are the real moods with you. But Lancelot is not a good man ; and (I am resolved to speak, even if you hate me) when we were together the other day he showed himself in a despicable light. You would have died, I believe, had you listened to him.'

Fidelia's face became deadly pale. At that moment she realized her happiness could never again be perfect ; a serpent had crept into Eden, and the full sense of security was gone. Other women might tell of joy which lasted during five, ten, even, in some cases, fifteen years. Hers had terminated in five

weeks. For a second it seemed as if she must burst into tears ; but, with tremendous force of will, she restrained all expression of feeling, and answered quite calmly : ‘ I can believe he said some things better left unsaid. No doubt he regrets that conversation with you already.’

‘ Oh, what can I do to convince you ? ’ cried Judith. ‘ Blame *me* as much as you please ; say that I spoil every one I approach ; only, don’t trust your happiness to Lancelot—he will break your heart, if you do. He does not love any human creature except himself, and he would sell his best friend for money.’

‘ Had we not better end this discussion ? ’ said Fidelia. ‘ We shall only argue until we quarrel ; already things have gone too far.’

‘ I have done no good,’ said Judith, ‘ and might as well have held my tongue. This hateful legacy has ruined both our lives.’

‘ You live under some delusion,’ replied Fidelia. ‘ Once before I heard you speak as if Aunt Winter’s money (it was not much after all) had brought a curse upon us. I am afraid you have let your thoughts fasten on the subject until it has taken a diseased hold of your mind.’

‘ Let it be granted that I am mad—as mad as a

March hare—my intuitions about Lancelot may still be sound. When do you intend to be married ?'

'In six weeks.'

'Six weeks ! And I might save you even now if I told what I could tell. But no ; it would be wasted breath. He has only to swear I am speaking falsely, and you would believe him.'

'I should never doubt his word.'

'Especially when the evidence against him is that of a mad woman.'

'It is the evidence of one who is fiercely prejudiced.'

'Fiercely prejudiced !' said Judith, with a heavy sigh. 'Do those words describe me, I wonder ? I am checkmated, that is all I know, and must let him win the game. There is only one thing left to wish for.'

'Only one ?'

'Yes ; that I may be dead before the day comes when you discover I spoke the truth.'

CHAPTER XXII

JUDITH tossed from side to side during the night which followed her conversation with Fidelia, and only fell asleep when morning came, to be tormented by dreams of a fearful nature. She continually fancied that her cousin stood by her side in tears, wringing her hands and saying : ‘It is you who have brought about my misery.’

Directly after breakfast, to escape from the aimless chatter of her fellow-boarders, she escaped into the open air. It was a lovely day, the sky blue, the air balmy ; but mental distress prevented her from observing these things, and even blinded her eyes to the fact that a man followed her from the moment she crossed her own threshold. When, at last, weariness compelled her to slacken pace, she was walking in the direction of the Certosa, and already some distance from home.

‘ Miss Hermann ?’ said a voice behind.

‘ How have you dared to follow me ?’ she cried.

‘Surely,’ replied Lancelot, ‘these roads are open to the whole world. If you had asked “How have you dared to speak to me?” I might have felt abashed ; though I think I could defend my conduct.’

‘Well, well,’ said Judith, impatiently, turning her face towards Florence, ‘we need not begin to argue ; quarrelling is foolish. You will soon be a sort of cousin, whose presence I must learn to put up with. At the same time——’

‘Judith——’

‘No, no ; not my Christian name, if you please.’

‘Let me explain my exact position.’

‘It doesn’t interest me.’

‘If you knew all, you would forgive all.’

‘You seem to have the impression that I think of you and your doings from morning till night. Cannot you receive the idea that I never by any chance think of you at all ? I am fully as egotistical as you are.’

‘It is only egotists who are happy,’ said Lancelot. ‘Sometimes I wonder if I did right in sacrificing my individuality so completely. Surely each human being has a right to some portion of himself.’

Judith opened her eyes rather widely, and gave the speaker a long look.

'Are you consciously a hypocrite?' she asked, 'or is this your honest verdict on your own life?'

'Let me relate it. You shall decide.'

'Not for worlds!'

'You are very cruel to me. What have I done to be jeered at in this way?'

'Don't you think we had better part company? Whenever we meet, we quarrel. It is disagreeable, quarrelling with connections. In six weeks, you will be married, and then we must speak civilly to each other, so there's no use in starting on wrong lines. Fidelia's husband ought to be on terms of ordinary civility with me.'

'Perhaps six weeks may bring changes,' said Lancelot, in an altered voice. 'I am the most miserable devil, at this moment, in Florence. It has been a shocking mistake.'

'Your engagement? Then break it off; don't lose a second. Write to Fidelia.'

'I can't escape in that manner. Didn't you once speak of "infamy" in connection with such actions?'

'Tell me why you made the mistake, as you call it?'

'I was driven mad—made desperate by your persistent scorn.'

‘ You mean that as I and my fortune were beyond your reach, you took Fidelia and hers ? ’

‘ I am not going to defend my character,’ said Lancelot, ‘ or to waste time making asseverations which would not be believed. You know in your heart you accuse me falsely. I love you as I never oved any woman—as I never shall love again. Money didn’t enter into the question. When I was beside myself, scarcely knowing what I did, Fidelia came—she has been amazingly good to me ; she is a saint. But I mistook gratitude for love—that’s all.’

‘ You ought to confess this to her.’

‘ I cannot, unless——’

‘ Unless what ? Do be quick ! We waste the whole day in beating about the bush.’

‘ Unless you will promise not to hate and despise me.’

‘ Oh yes, I promise ; I shall not despise you one atom more than I do now—somewhat less.’

Lancelot stamped his foot.

‘ Life is not worth living without you,’ he said.
‘ It has come to that.’

Judith drew back a few paces, startled by his vehemence, and looked round, as if she felt the need of protection. Two elderly tourists, with copies

of Baedeker in their hands, were strolling near, so much absorbed by their own thoughts that they took no notice of her or her companion; but she instantly quickened her pace in order to be near them.

‘Are you horribly offended?’ asked Lancelot.

‘No man of honour could put such a question.’

‘What shall I do? I have confessed my strait.’

‘Release Fidelia.’

‘To be covered with your contempt?’

‘Forget me; I don’t come into the question. If a five weeks’ engagement has begun to bore you, how do you mean to endure twenty years of married life?’

Lancelot’s face was deadly pale.

‘I should get through as others have done. These early days are the worst. I had rather sit in a dentist’s chair, in my present mood, than make love. But——’

‘Get through as others have done,’ said Judith.

‘Oh, poor Fidelia!’

‘You keep all sympathy for her?’

‘No; I reserve some for you. In proof of it, I implore you to bring this affair to an end. If you shrink from confessing your mistake, authorise me to do so in your name.’

Lancelot realised that this moment was crucial, and that he should have liked time to consider his position before answering. Judith's distress on first hearing of his engagement had caused him to believe, for a few brief seconds, that she cared about him more than she had ever acknowledged, and even her hot language had not quite cured this delusion.

'Women,' he argued, 'often pretend to be angry in order to hide their real feelings.' If he could have felt sure of her, he would have broken fifty engagements without a pang. But he was not by any means sure, and matters were desperate, for money must at all costs be had, and that without too much delay.

'Answer me,' she insisted. 'May I go to Fidelia in your name ?'

'No ; I must think a little longer.'

'Then you are responsible for all that follows. Remember I warned you. When trouble comes, don't blame me ; because I warned you.'

Her voice was very low, but he thought he discerned something like menace in it.

'What must I understand?' he asked. 'That you are my enemy?'

'I don't say so ; I only warn you that the con-

sequences of this refusal may be hard for both of us.'

'Do you intend to put an end to my life—to seize me by the throat and strangle me?'

He smiled, in spite of annoyance. It was an odd sensation to be threatened by this fragile creature, whom he could have crushed without using half his strength.

'No; I shall not hurt you in that way,' said Judith.

Then, with a sudden catch of the breath, she added, in a whisper, 'But I *shall* hurt you. Be wise; release Fidelia and go.'

'Explain your meaning more distinctly; I fail to understand.'

For answer Judith only looked at him again, but he recognised the same menace in her eyes as in her tones, and felt indescribably excited, stimulated, even, in a strange sense, happy.

'I take up your challenge,' he replied. 'It is to be war, now, to the knife.'

'To the knife,' said Judith. 'And here we are, at the gate of the city.'

When both were inside her animosity seemed suddenly to cool, for she waved her hand towards him in token of farewell.

‘We shall meet again before long, and then our duel will begin.’

‘As soon as you please.’

‘This evening, at my Aunt Constance’s house. I am going there.’

‘Are you in earnest?’

‘Absolutely ; you have taken up my challenge—don’t draw back.’

‘Explain ; you greatly bewilder me.’

‘No ; the explanation must be guessed—I never answer my own riddles. Are you beginning to be afraid?’

‘Not in the least. I never mean to rest until I have changed you from an enemy into a friend.’

‘That’s a rash vow,’ said Judith, ‘but it is made.’

CHAPTER XXIII

FIDELIA sat in her room in Florence, and wondered if she were the same woman who had come there, full of hope and energy, three weeks before. Such miserable weeks they had been ! Lancelot now was rarely with her. He paid visits, more or less formal, when he knew her mother was sure to be present ; he sent flowers each morning, and a note, often of apology for non-attendance at night ; but the larger part of every day was spent with Judith. Sometimes, being apparently seized with caprice, she evaded his pursuit, and led him a dance through all the picture galleries, streets, and squares of the city. When they met a battle of words used to follow, attracting many people to listen. She teased him, mocked him, laughed at him, then gave a look or said a sentence which apparently healed all wounds, for the next morning never failed to find him at her side again.

This behaviour was the more remarkable, as she

had lived in retirement all winter, never caring to see any one, or to go farther than circumstances compelled. Now her beautiful face and figure promised to become well known in Florence, especially when she procured a horse and rode in the Cascine at fashionable hours, always accompanied by Lancelot. The fiction of being enemies was still kept up.

'Your cousin is really too insolent,' he said once to Fidelia; 'she needs a lesson.'

'If you stay here till you have taught Judith how to behave,' replied Fidelia, 'you will never leave Florence at all.'

Mrs. Stafford heard this scrap of conversation, and looked deeply offended.

'That girl is deceiving you, Fidelia,' she exclaimed, directly Lancelot had gone. 'She is playing us all false; even the Colonel is convinced. He calls this a Benedict and Beatrice courtship. Such a Beatrice I never saw; but men are easily pleased.'

'Judith hates him,' said Fidelia; 'she has warned me never to trust a syllable he says.'

'That's hypocrisy,' replied Mrs. Stafford, 'or it may very well be she is acting from pure spite and vanity, trying to steal your lover, just to boast of it among her acquaintance. These red-haired girls are always treacherous.'

'I cannot believe such wickedness of Judith,' said Fidelia. 'Careless and flippant she is, but I never knew her to be cruel or false.'

'Well, I have said my say,' replied Mrs. Stafford. 'If you are guided by me, you will ask Lancelot what he means by his behaviour. *He* can speak the truth; that girl can't.'

When her mother left the room Fidelia wrote to Lancelot releasing him from his engagement and the next post brought a letter imploring her to trust him a little longer.

Fidelia waited, and tried to trust. During years of loneliness she had contracted a habit of talking to herself, and now these scraps of mental conversation always ran into one sentence: 'Must have patience—must have patience.' Mrs. Stafford heard the refrain, and, though by no means a sensitive person, her nerves received a shock.

Thus three weeks passed, the situation becoming more painful every day. Several English families who knew the Staffords were living in Florence, and they all found it extraordinary that Judith should spend so much time in the company of her cousin's lover. Various pieces of gossip began to circulate among the English coterie. There were comparatively few men to take Judith's part; but women abounded, and all

professed themselves of one mind—setting her down as a girl whom it was dangerous to know.

This evening, while sitting alone, for Lancelot had pleaded an engagement and did not come, Fidelia's thoughts fastened on Madame Hart as a possible friend. Judith and she lived on terms of intimacy, so a remonstrance from her lips would come with effect. It was even possible that she might persuade the troublesome one to quit Florence, where her presence could only do harm—ruining her own character quite as thoroughly as Fidelia's happiness.

Madame Hart's looks were in her favour. She was a great, big, kind-hearted woman, not handsome (all Fidelia's dread of beautiful people had returned in full force), with a deep voice, a broad chest, and an upper lip thickly covered with down. The pressure of her hand was something to remember. Fidelia's thin fingers were easily swallowed up in her huge palm, and used to lie there quivering, but not uncomfortable. If any one living could give help and counsel in such an emergency, it was she.

The Staffords happened to be out; no obstacle barred the way. Determined not to lose an opportunity which might never return, Fidelia wrapped herself in a dark cloak, slipped almost unobserved from the hotel, and set off through dimly lighted

streets to the Via Pandolfini. While walking hurriedly along she kept up her courage by remembering that only the week before, during a *mauvais quart d'heure*, when Lancelot was paying one of his duty calls, Madame Hart had come in and shown unmistakable signs of sympathy. Rumour said that her husband had treated her cruelly, having deserted her for a beautiful blonde. If this story were true, she was sure to be compassionate, and take the part of the woman who suffered. It was only her delicacy Fidelia doubted, not her shrewdness or warmth of heart. Tact her best friends could not claim for her, and, considering this for one minute, Fidelia felt inclined to turn back. Then she decided that to do so was to cast away her last hope, and pressed onwards.

Madame Hart occupied part of an old palace, now divided into flats, and kept house in a large-hearted manner which harmonised with her appearance. An old friend of hers, Signor Crispi, a violin player, had permission to receive his pupils in one of her rooms, while another friend, an English artist, lived on the floor above her own, so arranged that it could only be reached by passing through her private demesne. Madame's generosity did not stop here. She took compassion on a struggling photographer, and let

him exhibit specimens of his art on her walls. A young French girl, who earned a scanty living by copying Fra Angelico's singing angels, was allowed to advertise herself in the same manner, exciting suspicion in the minds of the vulgar that Madame Hart paid her rent by the money she received from these *protégés*. No idea could be more wide of its mark. Her hand perpetually dived into her pocket in search of something to give, but nothing ever found its way there in return. When the Englishman offered his rent she looked at it doubtfully, first put out her fingers to take, then drew them back in disgust. 'Keep it till I ask for it,' she said. 'I haven't asked yet, have I? High!'

When Fidelia arrived she found the front door wide open; but Madame's hospitable ways were too well known for such a circumstance to excite surprise, and she walked in without hesitation. Sounds of music issued from a large *salon* at the end of a long passage. Servants were flitting about, though none of them came sufficiently near to be of any use. After a few moments Fidelia guessed that this was the kind creature's reception night, when she liked to fill her rooms with a vast concourse of people—rich and poor, old and young, being jumbled together without the least respect of persons.

It was evidently useless to stay in the hope of talking to the hostess ; but perhaps a card might be left, which would suggest to her the idea of naming an hour for private conversation. The door of a small room stood open. Fidelia went inside, and had already taken a card-case and pencil from her pocket, when the sound of two very familiar voices reached her ear, making her stand still and forget what she intended to do. A large screen divided the room nearly in half, but a cheval glass was so placed that she could see Judith's figure reflected there.

'I don't intend to dance with you,' were the first words Fidelia heard ; 'I have said so twice already. Have the goodness to leave me alone.'

'You have trifled long enough,' replied Lancelot. 'Every day the same story. If you hate me, why did you come this evening ? I told you I was to be here ; Madame Hart told you. Is it that you like to show your power by enticing me after you and then driving me off ? Are you a demon of cruelty—a beautiful shell without a human heart ? What, in the name of Heaven, are you ? '

'Oh, don't use any solemn words,' cried Judith : 'they are out of place. You know what I am ; a creature who has been wretched enough to find her life entangled with yours.'

'Again!' cried Lancelot; 'insult on the top of insult. But if you despise me, why do you lead me on? I swear before God I should have disappeared about my business three weeks ago had you not deceived me by pretending to like my company. Has it all been mockery from first to last? Have you done this from a pure instinct of cruelty?'

'I told you there was war between us,' said Judith. 'I warned you—you cannot say I never warned you.'

Fidelia knew she was listening to conversation never meant for her; but though she tried to move towards the door her limbs refused to obey. She could see Judith's face now in the glass, and observed the look of disgust, almost like the nausea of seasickness, which was stealing over it.

'Why have you vowed hatred to me?' asked Lancelot, in a voice that trembled with the violence of his feeling. 'Is it because I dared to worship you, and confessed as much?'

At last Fidelia shook off the paralysis which had held her bound, and stepped in front of the screen. Judith stood perfectly still and silent; Lancelot uttered a sharp cry of anger, but found no words to defend himself.

'I am sorry,' said Fidelia, quietly, 'that I must

own to having heard part of your conversation. This is the last time I shall ever speak to either of you, so it is well to be brief. Lancelot, you are a coward. Judith, there are no words to describe conduct so base as yours ; it will bring its own punishment. Keep what you have robbed me of. I scarcely think it was a prize worth sinning for. Now, good-bye, and may God forgive you both.'

Outside the room her steps faltered, but she persevered, and walked bravely towards the front door. As yet there was no sense of pain to tell her what had happened. She knew she had been terribly hurt, and must soon suffer mental anguish ; but, for the present, there was a strange lull, like the calm before an earthquake. Halfway down that long interminable passage which lay between her and the open air, two people came in sight, Madame Hart and a stranger ; and she began quickly to account for her presence.

'I had forgotten your reception night. I hoped to have a talk with you.'

'Wait only an hour longer,' said Madame Hart. 'I shall be as solitary then as the Sphinx.'

'The questions I wanted to put are all answered,' replied Fidelia.

'You are not alone? Let me send for a carriage.'

'It is not necessary; I walked here.'

'Then you shall not walk back,' said Madame Hart, in her huge voice. 'Mr. Crewe, call a carriage for Miss Beresford. My dear child, come with me one moment.'

Her grasp was never easily resisted, and besides, Fidelia was just beginning to be conscious of misery. In throes of mental suffering, those who are weak always feel an impulse driving them to cling to people endowed with great physical strength. Fidelia held Madame Hart's hands as if they could save her from falling into the abyss of flames which was in the very act of opening at her feet.

'He was with her,' she said: 'they love each other.'

'Judith in love!' cried Madame; 'and with Lancelot Wood? Oh no; there's a mistake.'

'I heard too much: it is true!'

Madame Hart's experience supplied her with many histories of women who had thrown themselves away, as the phrase goes. She was too old to be easily astonished, still this piece of news brought her heart into her mouth.

'There's a mistake,' she repeated. 'Some things are possible; others not. This belongs to things impossible. I know Judith, you see. She has behaved disgracefully, and I have lectured her till we have quarrelled. I will lecture her again to-morrow, and get the whole truth, for in love with Mr. Wood I am sure she is not. Go home and sleep, if you can. Scarcely any one in the world is worth losing a night's sleep for. There's Mr. Crewe, to tell us he has brought a carriage. Have you a cloak? Good-night, my dear; and whatever you do, keep warm.'

When Aubrey returned from taking Fidelia to the carriage he found his hostess walking up and down.

'This is incredible,' she cried. 'Do you know what I hear? That Judith Hermann has stolen her cousin's lover. It is disgusting! If some one ran off with my watch, would it console me to remember the thing was pinchbeck—not gold? The theft is the same. High?'

Madame Hart had an indescribable way of saying 'High,' and always seemed to wait for an answer.

'An ignorant, paltry fool!' she went on, as Aubrey remained silent. 'They say he has a fine

ear, and can improvise. A photograph album with a musical box inside makes quite as good harmony. And Judith Hermann, of all women, to disgrace herself. I won't believe the story till I am forced.'

Madame Hart's acquaintance with Aubrey was of the slightest. He had come that evening to stay with Charles Duffield, the artist whose rooms formed part of her *étage*; and, in the course of conversation, had told her Judith was a friend of his childhood. This was all, and most people would have hesitated to be confidential on such slender basis; but discretion had never been one of the good woman's virtues. All the way to the *salon* she continued to talk.

'I have remonstrated with Judith. I have said—— Ah, here she comes.'

Judith knew perfectly well that people spoke evil of her, as a woman who could betray her friend for the sake of idle vanity; but the knowledge never troubled her at all. On the contrary, this undeserved blame partially delivered her from the deep inward sense of guilt which had proved her punishment ever since the day Clive returned to Riverscourt. At the moment, however, of meeting Aubrey's eyes, a sudden stab of pain seemed to pierce her heart, while it certainly covered her cheeks with crimson.

'Here is an old friend,' said Madame Hart, and her voice had a ring of anger. 'He only arrived at three o'clock.'

'I am going home, Aubrey,' said Judith. 'Come and see me to-morrow.'

She looked wistfully at him, repeating '*Come.*'

'May I not take you back to-night?' he said.
'I will call a carriage.'

'Not so quick,' interposed Madame Hart. 'What of your promise to sing for me? You cannot have forgotten. This is the evening you undertook to play "*Erl König*," and also to sing. It would be hard on me to lose your music and Mr. Crewe's society at one swoop. High?'

'I had forgotten,' said Judith. 'Of course I will keep my promise.'

She threw her cloak over the balusters and returned to the *salon*, Aubrey remaining at her side. He went to the piano with her, found her music, and arranged something which was amiss with one of the candles, as quietly as if they had been in the drawing-room of their old home. Judith played '*Erl König*' better than she had ever done in her life. A sense of impending doom hung over her, and found fitting expression in the mysterious music. Lancelot and she had separated in silence

when Fidelia left them, but such silence was more ominous than words, and she knew all her strength must be gathered together to meet a conflict. During the pause after the music, Aubrey drew a few steps backwards, and then, for the first time, Judith saw that her enemy had followed her into the *salon*, and was standing close beside the piano. His eyes were fastened on her with a burning, hungry look, which made her feel hot from head to foot, and horribly degraded.

‘Who is that man?’ whispered Aubrey. ‘What right has he to hunt you down? Send him away, Judith.’

‘To-morrow, to-morrow,’ replied Judith.

‘No; to-night.’

‘I dare not.’

‘Those are words I never heard from you; they sound unlike yourself.’

‘I am not like myself; I am in terrible straits. If you still feel kindly to me, go quickly. Oh, Aubrey, be merciful and go; to-morrow I will tell you all.’

‘I shall *not* go,’ said Aubrey, passionately. ‘I have always done as you asked me before; now you put me to a test which is cruel. Can I leave you while he is here? His looks are insulting. I shall stay, and divide you from him.’

‘He is coming towards us,’ said Judith, in a parched voice. ‘He will try to take revenge. If he ever tells you I gave him encouragement, remember it is false. *False—false—false.* I was entangled, and driven to act a part. I loathe him with all my nature. One wrong step, and it seems impossible ever to live honestly again. Oh, is that fair?’

‘Do you think I shall speak to him,’ said Aubrey, ‘or listen to a syllable he says? How long will it be before you know me, Judith? Have I loved you for so many years, to be influenced by the word of a stranger? Let me stand between you and trouble, as Lu would have done. You are not fit to sing. Come out of this hot room, and I will take you home.’

‘No, I cannot sing,’ said Judith. ‘I must go home; but not with you, Aubrey. Oh, don’t look so hurt! I want you to go with me, but I dare not give myself what I want. Come to-morrow—not to my house—to Santa Croce; I shall be in a chapel in the north transept. There is a monument to a Polish princess; you will see me standing beside it. And now tell Madame Hart I am ill, and forced to break my word; she cannot be surprised.’

‘But it is impossible you should go back alone.’

‘Santa will take me. She is that very old woman

standing near the principal door. Do you see ? An old wrinkled woman in a large cap.'

Aubrey walked with her across the room, to the place where Santa waited. He greatly desired to follow outside ; but her eyes, even more earnestly than her words, implored him to desist. She knew that already half the people present considered he was a fresh victim entangled in snares, and all her love and pride rebelled against the idea of doing him such dishonour.

Grim old Santa, who often walked home with her on these occasions, was perfectly willing to perform the duty now. Together they crossed the great square, where Giotto's Campanile shone in the light of a brilliant moon, then made their way, down one street after another, to the Ponta della Trinità. Sometimes Judith liked to pause here, and watch the reflected lights in the water, while the city slept, surrounded by hills, unconscious of her own loveliness. This evening Santa's steps could hardly move fast enough to keep pace. When they reached their destination, the old woman usually stood still on the ground floor and waited for a signal from the top of the staircase to tell her the ascent had been safely made. Santa was considered a trustworthy being, but her nature could not resist gold coin.

Just as Judith left her to climb the stairs, some one slipped a twenty-franc piece into her palm, good French gold, of which there is little enough in Italy. She turned and fled.

Judith caught the sound of steps coming after her. No time must be lost if she hoped to reach her own door at the very summit of those winding stairs before being overtaken. But Angela, the portress, must have fallen asleep, or failed to recognise the three taps which were Judith's invariable signal. Why else did she stop, on this of all nights in the year, to peep through a grid, instead of opening fast? Between the iron bars a man could be seen, with a dustcoat over his evening dress, who was trying to hold Judith's hands, while she struggled vehemently to release herself. Angela shrieked, 'Oh, Maria Purissima!' flung wide the door, the man disappeared, and Judith was drawn into safety.

'Some thief,' said Angela. 'He must have followed the Signorina upstairs; but where can Santa be?'

'Santa is safe,' replied Judith. 'I ran too fast, and am out of breath; but no harm is done. I think he was mad.'

Black rings showed beneath her eyes, and her voice sounded hollow and peculiar.

'There are many sorts of madness,' muttered Angela, who had recognised Lancelot quite distinctly.

Then aloud she added: 'Is your watch safe, Signorina, and your rings? Would it not be better to look?'

'My watch is here,' said Judith, 'and I wear no rings. Good night, Angela, I have been frightened, that's all; no harm is done. If you are wise you will never speak of this to anybody, lest the other ladies take alarm, and refuse to go out for fear of robbers.'

CHAPTER XXIV

JUDITH sat up all night in her dreary little bedroom, writing letters, tearing up papers, and making arrangements for leaving Florence. She was too energetic to spend fruitless time in regret, and, except when the shock of Ludovic's death changed her nature, never felt much tendency to lapse into reverie. One letter was to her mother, asking if she might be allowed to take back her promise of waiting a year before giving up her legacy. The second was to Colonel Winter, much shorter than the first; it only contained a few sentences:

'On the 6th of October (sooner, if my mother's consent can be had) I mean to give back the whole of the fortune I received through Lady Winter's will, and place it at your disposal. My reason for doing this will be clear. If you think that Fidelia and the others ought to have everything explained to them, I will write a statement of what happened during Lady Winter's illness and send it to you. I only want to

say, further, that Clive knew the whole truth before he died, and refused the money either for Rosny or himself.'

Often, during the last three weeks, while she thought herself compelled to act a part her nature abhorred, Judith had longed for the time when absolute sincerity would be possible. Any half-measures seemed barren of comfort. She must tell the whole truth, and stand before the world without disguise. Only the dread of grieving her mother (her poor mother, who would now learn the worst) made this confession painful. Directly the deed was done—in fact, the very moment she had signed her name at the foot of the page, she realised, with a rush of joy, that her freedom was accomplished, and that Lancelot had no power, as he would probably have no wish, further to molest her.

When eight o'clock struck she went downstairs and drank some coffee. At half-past eight the other inhabitants of the *pension* trailed in, one by one—a melancholy procession. There was an elderly lady, two middle-aged ladies, an 'old' young lady, and a widow of thirty-eight, the only lively one among them all. At this juncture Angela hurried up to Judith, speaking in a perfectly audible whisper. A visitor was in the *salon* who would not go away. She had

told him the Signorina was at breakfast. No use; he absolutely refused to leave without saying a few words to the Signorina. What was to be done?

Judith's thoughts flew at once to Aubrey. She knew that the closing of the door would be a signal for excited gossip and much questioning of the portress, but her eagerness to see her friend would not let her feel annoyed. She did not even observe the signs and grimaces which Angela was making, and disappeared down the passage before the last sentence had been finished. In the *salon* some one was waiting; not Aubrey. Her exclamation of welcome died on her lips as she looked at him.

'I see I am not the friend you expected,' were his first words. 'Mr. Crewe is to be congratulated on the warmth of his welcome—— for a few days.'

The pause before the last four words gave them point, and Judith's cheeks crimsoned.

'I wonder you dare to come and see me,' she cried. 'Yes; I wonder you dare. I shall be glad if you will cut this visit as short as possible; every moment you spend here is an offence.'

'I did not mean to offend you last night,' said Lancelot; 'I followed you and Santa because I was on fire till I knew what you meant. Have you no

heart at all, Judith ? Explain things. Do you understand what has happened ? '

' Fidelia is saved,' replied Judith ; ' that is just what I hoped would happen.'

' Then you did it deliberately ? ' said Lancelot, coming a few steps nearer. ' Deliberately and in cold blood you have destroyed my life ! '

' I warned you,' was all Judith could say.

He deserved his punishment, but she felt some scraps of pity for him ; his face looked so drawn, so deadly white, so changed.

' Tell me,' she added hurriedly, ' how it all came about. Was it poverty that drove you to such base doings ? Because, if that were the reason, I understand, and I am sorry for you. I cannot help what has happened ; it had to happen—it was the one and only way ; but I am sorry.'

' Your sorrow shows itself in remarkable fashion,' said Lancelot. ' And I fail to see what I have done that can be counted base. Most people would say the accusation recoiled on yourself.'

' It does,' said Judith.

Lancelot looked at her in astonishment.

' All this sounds very perplexing,' he exclaimed ; ' I don't profess to understand. I only know you have treated me with the cruelty of a fiend.'

‘But the trouble is about nothing,’ said Judith ; ‘about nothing. When you hear a little more, you will not think you have been wronged. I shall be poor in a few months : as poor as a beggar ; except that I have a head and hands, and can work.’

‘Are you telling me this to mock me ?’ asked Lancelot ; ‘because you think Mammon is the only god I worship ?’

‘No ; because it is true. I shall be poor in a few months.’

‘Have you lost your fortune ?’

‘I have relinquished it.’

Lancelot drew in his breath : ‘In favour of Clive’s little boy ?’

‘No ; his father refused it for him. I have placed the whole in General Winter’s hands ; he must do as he thinks best.’

‘And by this act of restitution you think you can escape me ?’ said Lancelot. ‘Better be a beggar than my wife—is that the way you regard it ?’

‘Exactly.’

‘Now ; listen to me,’ he continued. ‘No ; don’t ring the bell—it will do no good ; Angela is my friend, not yours. In this house there is not a single person who would be sorry to hear you were in trouble. I intend that you shall listen to a few words of reason.

You have tempted a desperate man. Last winter (I own it) your fortune was the prize I aimed for. At this moment it is yourself. Yes ; and I mean to have what I want.'

'Without my consent ?'

'No ; with your consent. I shall bring you on your knees—I shall make you glad to marry me.'

'There is always one way of escape,' said Judith, taking from her pocket a small penknife, and laying it expressively across her throat.

It was a flimsy thing, bought in Paris for a couple of francs ; but with slighter weapons life has gushed away.

'I don't mean to touch you,' said Lancelot. 'Put that rubbish back, we are not acting a bad melodrama. Do you know what you have done ? No. You cannot answer. Well, I must tell you. Three weeks ago I cared for my reputation ; I wished a thousand things. Now, I don't value the world's opinion at a farthing. And I wish for nothing, except yourself. I know you are a beautiful devil, with eyes that can draw the soul out of a man's mouth and leave him by the roadside, a dead body, useless for evermore. Oh ! I know all that ! But I cannot exist without you. Fiend or woman, it is the same. You shall live

with me, talk to me, smile as you can smile (no other lips have the trick), fly into rages if you like—I don't care how often—but they shall be rages directed against me. Before changing my blood into fire, you ought to have reckoned the consequence.'

Judith possessed splendid physical courage, but she needed all she had to retain an outward show of calm and keep her brain at work. Up to this time Lancelot had seemed nothing more than a selfish *dilettante*, who played at being in love as children play with rockets. She saw him now in a new light, and realised the fearful strength of the passions her systematic trifling had evoked. He was standing between her and the door, but she walked quickly towards the window and looked out, as if reckoning the height from the pavement.

'Take care!' he cried. 'It is too great a leap. Come back! I don't choose that you should hurt yourself. Oh, there's no use struggling. I am twenty times stronger than you. When I have finished all I mean to say I will let you go; not one second before. You are in love with another man, with that pale-faced artist: There's no explaining taste in matters of this sort. I watched you last night, while you were speaking to him.

Remember, that the day you marry him will prove a black day for you both.'

'Unloose my wrist!' said Judith. 'You are mad to behave with such violence. What can threats do? I am not in your power.'

'Wait and see.'

'These are ravings to frighten a child.'

'They have driven the blood from your cheeks.'

'I have no intention of marrying any one; I had a thousand times rather live alone.'

'You say so?' cried Lancelot, his eyes sparkling.
'The very assurance I wished for.'

'But if I choose to marry, I shall,' replied Judith, tossing her head back proudly. 'Understand me, *I shall*. I despise your threats as much as I despise you.'

Lancelot's gaze seemed to devour her. Then he drew it away with huge difficulty, and turned to leave. Suddenly, before opening the door, he stopped, and said, in a low tone, without looking round :

'Denis is married.'

'Thank God!'

'He tells me he blesses the hour in which you played him false. He has found a woman worth a hundred of you. There was a stronger expression

than that, but I spare your ears. The history of your lovers is remarkable. Their love has to change to hate before it can burn steadily. But history repeats itself sometimes. If Denis and I have learnt to hate you, why not also another ?'

'Why not ?' thought Judith, as the door closed. She felt sick, faint, horribly, unutterably degraded. Her wrist was red, where those hot fingers had clenched it—red, and stiff, and sore. The room seemed full of his presence ; the air heavy with his breath. Outside, Angela's voice could be heard, screaming to her fellow-servant—Angela, who was in his pay.

Before to-morrow another shelter must be found, since this house had ceased to be safe. The people at the Post Office ought to know the new address quickly, that was the most important thing to remember, else General Winter's letter might be intercepted and read.

So far Judith's thoughts rushed. Then, with a shudder, she paused, and asked herself what use there could be in trying to screen her disgrace, when, in three weeks at the furthest, all who knew her would know her miserable story.

CHAPTER XXV

ON her way to Santa Croce Judith passed the hotel where the Staffords were staying. She did not need to do so, but feverish desire to obtain a glimpse of her cousin had pursued her all day. Strangely enough, this wish was gratified, for just as she came near the house an open carriage drew up before it, and Fidelia walked very slowly across the pavement and seated herself inside. The weary dejection of her movements cut Judith to the quick. Mrs. Stafford followed, and asked where they should go.

‘Oh, *anywhere*,’ replied Fidelia.

Judith, hidden behind a portico, caught these words, and was struck by the look of utter hopeless indifference which accompanied them. Hitherto Fidelia had possessed indomitable force of will; her mind always seeming to triumph over the frail tenement in which it lived. Often her friends used to complain that the more ill she felt the more

intensely energetic she showed herself; but those were days when she did not carry a wounded spirit about with her. Judith realised bitterly that, whatever turn events might take, the friendship between her and her cousin must be looked upon as finally broken. No excuse could be offered in palliation of her conduct which would not seem more insulting than the original offence.

Another trial awaited her in Santa Croce. As she passed up the nave a lady went by, the wife of a celebrated English artist. Judith and she had met several times at Madame Hart's, and 'made friends' over books, pictures, and discussions; but, this afternoon, her reluctance to exchange even ordinary greetings was painfully clear. Directly Judith came in sight her head turned away, and she pretended to be lost in admiration of a very ugly monument. No doubt the tale of Fidelia's wrongs and her cousin's treachery had flown far and wide.

The chapel, which Judith had chosen as a meeting place, was one of her favourite resorts on account of a recumbent statue to be seen there. She was too careless of authority to let herself be hedged round by rules in matters of art, and this monument to a Polish princess, though a work of a

modern sculptor, pleased her exceedingly. It even gave her as much satisfaction as the effigy of the bishop close by, to which Ruskin has called the world's attention. Frequently she stood still for half an hour, unconscious of the lapse of time, drinking in the pathos of those thin clasped hands and the dignity of the sweet face on its marble pillow.

Aubrey had been waiting five or ten minutes, and came forward eagerly. Then he stopped, alarmed to see her face so pale, her expression so disordered. She gave a quick glance round, as if some enemy might have been lurking in the shadows, before beginning to speak.

'Is not this monument beautiful? I often come here. I have said my prayers beside it many times. The face reminds me of Lady Winter's. There's a look of awe, of solemn expectancy. My aunt's expression was just like that, the night she died.'

'You are right,' said Aubrey; 'the conception is noble.'

'I like the drapery, too,' continued Judith; 'it falls in beautiful lines, large and simple; there's no pretence of being anything but what it is: a marble covering. Very few people come here, but my prayers are too short to be noticed if they did come; and in Roman Catholic churches we are allowed to

pray where we please. I only say, “Oh, *Someone*, help me!” That is all.’

‘My poor Judith,’ said Aubrey, ‘how terribly you have suffered! There’s no one here now. Rest on this chair and tell me how it happened. Never try to carry sorrow alone.’

‘In a few months I shall be poor,’ she whispered, ‘as poor as you once said you wished I were. I have written to General Winter and given back the money. Perhaps, now, I shall have rest. But there is this new grief about Fidelia. I was obliged to hurt her; I did it to prevent worse things happening—because my deceitfulness had made her rich, and then her riches brought danger. He told me he did not care for her: that he was angry with the fate which bound him to marry her. His one desire was to get free; only her money had tempted him, and her money he could not renounce. When he said that, I knew her misery would be on my soul for ever, unless some way of escape were found. This way, the way I tried, was the only way. She is rescued from him, but at the cost of such pain! I never dreamt she would care as she has done. I thought her patience wouldn’t hold out ten days, and she bore it for three weeks. Three weeks! And each morning I have risen to go through the farce of

pretending to ensnare him. Ensnare him ! Think of my degradation. And, after all, Fidelia's happiness is lost.'

'It was a terrible thing to do,' said Aubrey. 'I shall never think of it calmly : never without feeling my blood run fire. But you acted for the best, and some day Fidelia will realise what a deliverance she has had.'

'I am afraid her heart is broken,' said Judith, 'and her faith in love is gone—in all love, not only his.'

'And you ?' said Aubrey. 'Has he tried to see you since last night ? What has happened ?'

'I saw him this morning ; there is no need to speak of him any more. Don't think of him, Aubrey. I am anxious about my mother ; she must hear what I have done and be ashamed. The last time I saw her she looked so tired, so melancholy ; her face was marked with lines that never used to be there before this money brought disputes. Oh, Aubrey, a sword goes through me when I think of her and *you*. You must hear.'

'No, I shall never hear.'

'You must ; and I must tell you. Unless I speak, and you listen, there can never be full confidence between us again.'

'*I know,*' whispered Aubrey. 'Do you think I could love you as I do and not discover that something lay heavily on your heart? I have known from the day I came to see you in Rivington. Don't say another word, dearest; not another syllable. The very instant you wrote that letter you speak of, the past was destroyed.'

'I tried to put it right before,' said Judith, 'when I went to Bournemouth; but Clive refused to let me do as I wished.'

'I guessed you had met with some hindrance.'

'Then I wanted to give the money to my mother; but she refused it. I was turned back each time I tried to get free. And her distress frightened me so much I promised to wait a year before doing anything else. It was only lately—only since I felt myself being covered up with hypocrisy—that I gathered courage to write to General Winter. He will let every one know: he has no motive to keep it secret. When I have told you I shall feel there is nothing hidden.'

'You need not tell me,' said Aubrey. 'I will not hear; I refuse ever to think of it again. The past has no existence for me.'

'But I *must* tell you. Oh, do listen! Clive wrote to me and enclosed a letter for his mother.

There was time to give it, but I waited and waited, and then she died and never knew, and her money came to me—to me and poor Fidelia. Do you understand? Have you heard every word ?'

' Every word, my dear one.'

' And now I must leave you. If I stay a minute longer I shall be doing wrong, and, besides, I am afraid to stay out after dusk. I must go quickly.'

' Afraid ?' echoed Aubrey. ' Who could hurt you while I am here ? You are safe with me.'

' I cannot explain,' whispered Judith. ' Let me go.'

' Then I shall go with you.'

' No, no ; if you do that, you may, one day, regret having done it, and then——'

' Regret ? Oh, Judith, when will you learn to know me ? You are very hard to convince.'

' Others who loved me have begun to hate.'

' They had no right to say they loved you ; they scarcely knew you. Do you think that my love, which began when we were children, can be named in the same breath as theirs ? They worshipped your appearance. I love that too ; but I love the beautiful inner self as well, of which they know nothing. Trust yourself to me, dearest ; let us work through the troubles you speak of together.'

'I am like Pompilia in the Ring and the Book,' said Judith, drawing closer to him. 'It is not a lover I need, but a friend; and I think it must always remain so. From the very first, whenever I thought of such things, even as a bare possibility, something in me seemed to start back, to feel unwilling; I was born to be a sister, not a wife. Won't you take the love I have to give you, the same sort of love I gave Lu?'

Every sentence fell on Aubrey's heart like a clod of earth on a coffin. Long ago he had been aware of a solitary inclination in Judith, a peculiar 'aloofness' which made her difficult to touch. Often, when he fancied he knew her most intimately, she had startled him by some casual remark, betraying the existence of an inner life, hidden even from those who loved her best, and imagined they shared all her secrets. It was terrible to be repulsed in this fashion, to be obliged to stand aside, unable to help by act or word, while she 'moved ghost-like to her doom.'

'You mustn't be vexed with me,' she whispered. 'I cannot help it! You and Lu have always divided my heart between you, and since he has gone where it is impossible to see him, I hunger doubly to see you. You are a bit of him, Aubrey, and your own

dear self as well. But I shall never marry any one. I was made like that.'

Her eyes, full of tears, sought out his.

'Have you always felt in this way?' he asked, half resentfully.

'Always. Once, when I was poor, that insane longing I had to be rich tempted me to give Denis a feeble promise; but, directly I had done it, I knew I should not be able to keep my word. He has the right to hate me. Now and then, when I have come very near you in my thoughts, I have felt glad (oh, don't think me cruel) because there was something in the centre of my being which remained alone, which would always remain alone, which no one, not even the friend I loved best, could touch. And if I felt in that way then, how much more now, when to any one who loves me I can only bring sorrow and disgrace!'

Aubrey would have held her hand and poured out a torrent of eager denials and entreaties, in words as hot as the heart they came from; but she rose suddenly, looking paler than when she came, and gave a frightened glance into the gathering twilight.

'There are no lights in this chapel. I only see some candles burning dimly across the transept. Come with me, Aubrey, into the open air—as quickly as ever we can!'

He accompanied her down the nave and through the west door. Then her eyes once more were raised beseechingly.

'I shall find a carriage and drive home—I must go by myself. I am safe alone. We might both be in danger together. Remember what I said: it is not a lover I need now, but a friend.'

'To-morrow?'

'Wait until I write.'

'Oh, Judith, this mystery is killing me! Why must I leave you?'

'To save me from sorrow.'

There was no resisting the appeal in her voice. He stood perfectly still on the steps of the church, and watched her carriage rush into darkness.

CHAPTER XXVI

ALL at once a voice at his elbow made him look round. Lancelot was standing on the same step, gazing in the same direction. His appearance had altered so strangely since the previous night, that, for a second or two, Aubrey fancied he must be under the influence of opium.

‘Would you believe,’ he said, ‘that such a lovely face could hide a nature as cruel as a serpent’s? Are you in love with her? In love with *her*? It isn’t possible. She has something about her that cannot rightly be called human. No one in his senses could love her. Some think they do, and then find out it was hate all the time—hate that burns, and makes life not worth living.’

‘That will do,’ said Aubrey. ‘Don’t say any more.’

‘You trust her,’ continued Lancelot, rapidly. ‘So did I; her victims never listen to warnings. If they did, I shouldn’t be the most miserable wretch

in Florence. Listen! Let me tell you—let me explain my case.'

'Had you not better go home and rest?'

'No, no; I must first explain my case. I cannot get any one to understand it—they always go off on the wrong point. That girl has a heart as false as Satan's. She will lie to you, and then smile. Such a smile! Her mouth has an exquisite curve, and she carries her head all the time like a queen. Though she smiles, she never stoops. What was I telling you—about her cruelty? She likes to watch men in pain. When I wanted to get away she drew me back. Her eyes would bring people out of Paradise to talk to her. I wasn't in Paradise, I was in Hell, so, of course, she found it easy work to bring me. And never once has she let me touch her hand—never once, until this morning, when I held it till she writhed. I was a fool to be so gentle. But she unnerves me; that's to say, her beauty does—not herself—*she* is a demon.'

Aubrey had allowed his strange companion to draw him down the steps and across the square. They were now walking very quickly in the direction of the Via Pandolfini; but though Madame Hart's door was almost in sight, he had no intention of entering it alone. The idea that Judith's life was

in peril from a man who stood on the borderland between reason and insanity made his pulses beat fast.

‘Come home with me,’ he said. ‘Madame Hart is a friend of yours. She may be of service to you——’

‘The only service I need is to be told where she is going,’ said Lancelot. ‘She means to leave Florence. Her money is running short, and she has given up the fortune she stole in order to escape from me. That’s why she did it—to escape from me. But there will be no escape. Wherever she goes I shall follow, until I have made her stop and listen, and love me, and repent of her cruelty, and tell me——’ His words became incoherent from the rapidity with which they were spoken, but Aubrey had ceased to pay any attention, being wholly occupied with a scheme of defence.

‘Don’t think any more to-night,’ he said. ‘Go home and take a sleeping draught, and rest.’

‘I have taken hundreds. It is weeks and weeks now since I had any natural sleep. Oh, I forgot; I meant to explain my case—to ask your verdict. I had promised to marry a good woman. But love won’t come to order, you know; there’s too much to be gone through. I tried to do all she expected, and

it made me ill. Sleep went from me. I used to think I should go mad the night before the wedding. I took chloral to give me forgetfulness. Then I came here, and met that girl almost the first evening. Some devil had a hand in it, I suppose. Ever since I have been living on hope and disappointment, and mouthfuls of joy, till last night, when I discovered what her game was. She had deceived me all the time. I think after that something went wrong in my head—something broke to pieces. I must go and see her again ; I must tell her what I have told you. This morning I was not accurate enough ; she did not grasp my meaning.'

Aubrey saw no plan except to walk blindly on, and let the other lead him where he would, hoping by this means to discover his usual place of shelter. They reached the Lung' Arno at last, and here, in front of an hotel, Lancelot paused.

'I sha'n't sleep, but I had better go in. I have letters to write. You and I may see each other to-morrow. It has done me good to talk to you. I hated you, until I saw that you hated her—now.'

Aubrey drew his arm away quickly.

'What's the matter ?'

'I must leave you ; but in half an hour I should like to come back and bring a friend with me.'

‘A friend of yours?’

‘Yes.’

‘No need. I had rather not be disturbed. I shall write my letters, and take something and sleep.’

‘Very well; but I may look in, perhaps, to see if you have fallen asleep. If not, you will most likely be downstairs.’

‘If you come alone, you may,’ said Lancelot, suspiciously. ‘Don’t bring a doctor. I can manage my own affairs thoroughly. I won’t be treated as if I were mad; remember that. Come alone.’

He disappeared indoors, his tall figure swaying like a tree cut at the roots and ready to fall. Aubrey went back to Madame Hart for counsel, but she had not seen Lancelot, and her advice was all for keeping calm and waiting.

‘He has looked like a sleep-walker ever since he came here,’ she said. ‘The Staffords must be as blind as kittens. Old Rubini, who cuts his hair, told Santa the Signore would blow his brains out some morning, and then there would be no wedding. When servants talk like that things are not satisfactory. High?’

‘All the more reason to see after his health quickly. He ought to have a doctor at once.’

'Not to-night; you will make a scene. Leave him alone till to-morrow; then I will call myself, and ask him to come here on a visit to me. My house is a menagerie already. You and Duffield are the only healthy people in it. I shall be crazy myself soon. But with so many to see after, one more or less won't signify.'

'Will he come?'

'Oh, he will come; no one ever refuses to come.'

'And you think he can be kept indoors?'

'I shall ask my own doctor to attend him. My whole time is taken up in helping lame dogs over stiles, and clearing up the confusion others leave behind them. That's the way the world's work arranges itself. High!'

Aubrey was only half satisfied. He went back to the Lung' Arno, inquired for Lancelot, and found he had eaten some dinner and gone upstairs.

'Do you think I can see him?'

'The Signore gave orders he would not be disturbed.'

'Take my card up, and slip it beneath his door; perhaps he will come out and see me.'

This was done, but brought no result. Aubrey felt it impossible to return home. The idea that

Lancelot would try to force his way to Judith haunted him like a nightmare, and, besides, there were other terrors. He walked up and down, in front of the house, watching one window where a light could be seen burning. The air was soft and balmy ; stars kept appearing one by one in the far distance ; the tumult of the city died slowly away. Strangely enough, a sentence from the Burial Service sounded in his ears, almost as distinctly as if a voice had spoken it : ‘ Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.’

The whole story of the weakness of human nature seemed told in those words. They even to his fancy conveyed an appeal for mercy. When disgust sickened him, he remembered ‘ Man that is born of woman,’ and contempt changed to some other feeling less hard. When he crimsoned at the thought of Judith’s impulsive recklessness, and stamped his foot with anger at the love of money, which had spoilt three lives, the rest of the sentence rang in his ears : ‘ Hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.’ Human beings must have pity on each other, for the longest existence is brief, and sorrow the portion of all.

After an hour had gone by he felt relieved, and, at half-past eleven, decided that no catastrophe,

involving Judith, could happen that night. Moreover, the window he imagined to be Lancelot's was darkened. Much easier in his mind, he returned to the Via Pandolfini; but very early next morning was up again and out, being anxious to convey a warning to Judith, who ought certainly to keep indoors, or, better still, to leave Florence with some carefully chosen escort. Angela stared hard at him and promised to deliver his letter. He would rather have given the message by word of mouth, but she said this was impossible, as the Signorina refused to come out of her room for any visitor whatever. Only yesterday Signor Crispi called about some music, but the Signorina would not see him, and she, Angela, had to run up and down stairs till her breath was all gone.

There was nothing Aubrey could do now, except wait in quivering impatience until Madame Hart had written her letters and issued her orders for the day. About half-past ten she started on her errand of kindness, and in less than thirty minutes he heard her voice calling him—

‘Is it settled?’ he asked, and immediately noticed that she looked very pale.

‘It is all over,’ she said: ‘the blow has fallen. I was too late.’

‘Has he hurt Judith? What is it? Quick! ’

‘No, he has not hurt Judith; he has hurt himself. They found him this morning.’

She gave some details, to which Aubrey listened as if in an ugly dream.

‘If we had forced a doctor into the house yesterday, he would only have flown into a passion and cursed us all. He had a dread of being treated like a lunatic, so the people tell me. What has to happen, has to happen. No use in regrets.’

Madame Hart always said that the experience of life had made her a Fatalist. Aubrey, who did not hold her views, went to and fro in thought, remembering one thing, regretting another, till his senses reeled.

‘They have sent to tell the Staffords,’ she continued, ‘and I think I must go to Miss Hermann myself. Oh yes! I shall be merciful, trust me. No; you had better keep away. I can go to her room and make my voice heard outside, so that she need not fear to open. You couldn’t do that. Stay here, and directly I return I will tell you how she bore it.’

How would she bear it? This was the question which occupied Aubrey during that awful hour of suspense. Only one hour, but at the end he knew what men feel who have been imprisoned for twenty years.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON Wednesday afternoon, Fidelia, who had spent five days in restless wanderings about Florence, went into the church of Santa Maria Annunziata. Ever since the fatal moment on Saturday, when her mother came into the room with terror on her face, and said, ‘Prepare, Fidelia, for the worst news you can hear,’ her heart had turned to stone. She would have given all she possessed if the dogmas she used to cherish could have come back to her as living truths. Once, long ago, in a time of great distress, she had gained consolation by merely repeating one sentence over and over again: ‘The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.’ To her mind they conveyed a promise of help, of final victory. Now they seemed as barren of sustenance as sawdust. She looked to the right hand and the left, but darkness prevailed everywhere, unlightened by a gleam of hope.

Many rumours circulated in Florence. The majority of people held that Lancelot’s death was

caused by Judith's outrageous conduct in beguiling him from her cousin, and then throwing him contemptuously aside. Fidelia, on the other hand, clung fast to the idea that his heart had always been true to his first love, and that he died from remorse at having been tempted to betray her. This imagination was the one comfort she possessed—dismal comfort certainly ; but, in times of famine, human beings have to live on miserable fare.

As she walked round the church, too sick at heart to care what she did, her eyes fell on Judith kneeling in a dark corner. Strange to relate, Fidelia's first feeling was one of anger that her cousin should be able to pray ; it seemed so dishonest, so unjust. Judith, that unbaptised heathen thing, whom Herbert and she had regarded as a species of Neckan—excusable only because she could scarcely be said to own a moral nature—on her knees in church ! During the last year, Fidelia had often spoken bitterly of people who, as she said, ‘left their intellect at home on Sunday morning, went through certain forms, and then returned to scientific and rational views in the afternoon.’ Such persons she counted little better than thieves. At all events, she would say, ‘I am consistent or nothing.’ Had Judith dared to join the

ranks of the hypocrites, cheating her own mind, soul, and spirit ?

They were very close to one another, these two unhappy women—the one who had loved the dead man intensely, and the other who had never cared for anything belonging to him—very near, and yet living in different worlds. Once Judith raised her head, and Fidelia was appalled at the change in her appearance. She looked the ghost of herself. What could it mean ? Was she devoured by remorse ? Had she come here to purge her conscience of guilt ? Did she really believe that her prayers could be of the least use, or was she only muttering incantations, as the heathen do, repeating one eternal round of words to weary the god by their much speaking ?

At last she rose, and turned her white face in the direction of her cousin. Ten minutes ago Fidelia would have expected to shrink away with shuddering repulsion ; but something she saw in those sad eyes, something altogether new and strange, made this impossible.

‘ *You can pray ?* ’ she exclaimed, and paused.

‘ Not for myself,’ cried Judith, as if she would have said, ‘ So base as that I am not.’

‘ You have no right to be here,’ repeated Fidelia. ‘ Look round you ; do you believe in *one* even of the symbols you see ? ’

'It is all so dark,' said Judith. 'We do not know where we came from, nor where we are going ; we know almost nothing at all. In the midst of mysteries, surely we may hope——'

'Oh, we may hope,' echoed Fidelia. 'What I hunger for is certainty. Is he living somewhere, or is he blotted from existence ? Does he remember the past ? What can I do for him ? *You* may content yourself with hope. You never loved him.'

'No ; I never loved him.'

'And yet were cruel enough to deceive him ! It is such as you who can pray ! '

'Not for myself,' repeated Judith, 'I only want to undo the harm I have done. It doesn't seem possible there should be no help anywhere. If we perish when we die, why should I suffer as I do—why should it seem so terrible to have chosen Evil instead of Good ? What demon ever conceived such a trick ? To fill us with longing—to make us loathe ourselves—to give us such a power of loving that we would die to save the souls we have wronged, and then trample us down in utter extinction ! It wouldn't be fair, Fidelia, it wouldn't be fair.'

She wrung her hands together in extremity of anguish.

'So much that happens is unfair,' said Fidelia.

'That's the strange part,' continued Judith. 'Mistakes are visited with awful judgment, and great sins escape. You blame me for the act in which I was most innocent. And another strange thing is this : Since I have been here, I have seen my whole life in a pin's head, as people do when they are dying, and I know the year when the germ of this misery began to grow. I was a little child, at first, but, as it grew, I became aware of it, and at Riverscourt I knew that unless I freed myself it would eat my heart all up. But I had not strength to free myself, or to prevent a terrible result, and then the suffering began, making me feel as if I had never really lived before. Perhaps, when you first knew me, I might have died and perished ; I was different then. Something has been born in me now—born with terrible pain—which mocks me unless it lives for ever.'

Fidelia stood speechless. If she had been asked to describe her sensations, she might have said she saw men as trees walking. Until this moment she had never suspected the existence of a dual nature in Judith ; of a spiritual part which suffered torment while the bodily part lived at ease, faring sumptuously every day. Such a revelation gave Materialism the lie.

'I must pray,' continued Judith, 'I suffocate unless I pray. But no words ever come, only a desperate longing, and then a hope.'

'What is it you hope for—is not all hope gone?' asked Fidelia.

'Not quite,' said Judith, whose voice, hitherto very low, had fallen to a whisper. 'There is just this: If I have learnt anything by pain, perhaps he may learn too. Perhaps this awful way of dying was the only way in which he could learn, and so it was allowed to happen, and Aubrey was prevented from saving him. Because I learnt by doing wrong. My conscience never woke till I had done something I was ashamed of; it was there in the germ, but until it came out openly I never cared. You cannot understand me; I forgot you did not know. Tomorrow or next day you will know, and then you will see why I hope for him. If I am worth saving, surely he is worth saving. Oh, I feel sure that the Power which gave us both existence will not let his life be lost.'

She hid her face in her hands, and scalding tears came to her relief. Fidelia went away without a word, walking through the streets like one who goes in a dream.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JUDITH had taken the precaution to put private on the envelope containing the letter to Mrs. Hermann. It proved well she had done so, for, after six days, a note came from Bertha, who said that their mother was confined to her room, and had been advised to keep perfectly quiet. Under these circumstances she judged it best to return Judith's letter unopened, fearing the contents might harass the invalid.

The same post brought a letter from General Winter. He wrote very briefly, enclosing a copy of the will which Lady Winter made before her last illness, and saying that he feared it would be necessary to tell Fidelia all that had happened or was going to happen.

In this will Mrs. Hermann received ten thousand pounds, free of legacy duty; the bequests to Mrs. Stafford and Herbert remained the same; so did those to Miss Felkin and the hospitals; Lancelot

was not mentioned; neither was Judith. Fidelia had ten thousand, free of legacy duty. The rest of the money, about eighty thousand pounds, was left to Clive, but in such a manner that he could not touch the capital, which was placed under the charge of trustees, to be divided among his children, if he had any, at the time of his death.

Judith now wrote the following sentences, and signed them with her name :—

‘Fifteen hours before my aunt’s death I received a letter from Clive. He enclosed in the same envelope another letter directed to his mother. I delayed to give this letter until too late. I then destroyed it, which he had asked me to do if by misfortune it arrived when she was no longer living. At the time the letter came my aunt was fully conscious, and remained so until half an hour before she died.’

The sheet of paper containing this confession was sent to General Winter, and Judith next wrote to Violet, giving the exact words in which Clive had refused his mother’s money for the little boy. It seemed very strange to her that she could live through such bitter experiences and retain the use of her reason. For years afterwards a dream haunted her, in which she sat writing that confession, without

being able to come to the end. She always went as far as the sentence beginning ‘I delayed,’ and there the pen used to stop, some obstacle, never explained, keeping her hand inactive.

Fidelia had left Florence before matters reached this stage, but the General found out her address and asked for an interview. He showed her what Judith had written, and she replied she must have time to think before deciding on any action. In less than a week she told him there was no proof that Lady Winter would have made a new will on receiving Clive’s letter. She might have done so, or she might not; no one could hazard an opinion. For her own part, while feeling it impossible ever to spend the money on herself, she objected to tie it up for Rosny. Such conduct, in her eyes, would be nothing less than cruel, while so many starving people needed the common necessaries of life. How much better to place the whole fortune in trust and use it for the benefit of the poor !

General Winter was a bigoted old Tory. In his eyes the circumstances which gave some men wealth too vast to spend, and plunged others into brutalising poverty, were ordained by God. He could not grasp what Fidelia meant by talking as if these differences were accidental.

'She is mad,' he said to Violet, 'she must be mad ; but see the ingenuity with which she begins her letter. "We have no proof that Lady Winter would have changed her will." Neither we have. There's no use carrying this case to the courts, even if consideration for Miss Hermann did not make that difficult. These lunatics have sometimes dangerously keen wits where their own interests are concerned. What in the world are we to do now ?'

'Clive seems to have been very anxious Rosny should not inherit,' said Violet. 'I feel sure Judith's story is accurate. And you very well remember the evening she called at our house in Bournemouth.'

'Oh, nonsense, my dear,' said her father : 'in weighty matters of this sort we cannot be guided by sentiment. Clive had no atom of right to deprive his son of a fortune bequeathed by the grandmother. If the money had been his own he might have done as he pleased ; but it was not his own. Here are eighty thousand pounds, placed in the hands of trustees for the grandchild. Clive had only the life interest ; he had no power to will away the capital. Do talk more sensibly, my dear.'

'I so well understand Clive's fears,' said Violet.

'Do you mean to tell me,' said the General, 'that it is an honourable thing to cut a boy of eight years

old off with a shilling, because he may possibly, when he is twenty-five, prove a scoundrel ? Again I beg of you to look at this question calmly, without feminine prejudice. Would such conduct be that of a sane person ? I maintain that to disinherit Rosny would be an act of gross injustice, and flying, moreover, in the face of Providence, which ordained he should be placed in a position of responsibility.'

'Does the fact of Rosny's parents not being married make any difference ?' asked Violet.

'Not as the will was expressed—it was very carefully expressed. About a year and a half before Rosny was born I heard some rumours regarding Clive, and let his mother know what I had heard. She showed no signs of offence or astonishment ; but this delusion about the poor fellow being dead seems to have driven actual facts out of her head again.'

For many weeks the conflict about the money raged, though Judith escaped all knowledge of it. Fidelia held to her purpose, refusing every compromise. She only consented to give Rosny five thousand pounds in lieu of Herbert's present (now of course returned) ; but the rest of her legacy she kept in her own hands, spending every farthing in the service of the poor. One of her schemes resulted in a community being established not far from London, a

‘Cave of Adullam,’ where all who were unfortunate, or in debt, or discontented, could repair. Judith’s share of Lady Winter’s money, after the legacy to Mrs. Hermann had been paid, was placed in trust for Rosny, and when this was done her interest in the matter ended.

The six months which followed her visit to Italy were spent in her mother’s company, first in Switzerland, then in a very quiet apartment Aubrey found for them in Paris. Mrs. Hermann showed much less distress, on hearing the truth, than any one could have anticipated. Her strength was greatly broken, and the comfort of living once more with Judith, and being lovingly cared for, seemed to compensate for all that was melancholy or perplexing in the past. Even the economy they were forced to practise did not trouble her. On the contrary, she confessed herself glad that Judith was no longer a distinguished stranger, from whom every sordid detail of daily existence must be hidden away.

Aubrey lived much with them during these months, and was far from unhappy, though a strange autumnal sensation followed him everywhere. He could have felt certain the season was always late October ; that showers of faded golden leaves were continually falling at his feet.

Judith discovered pupils to whom she gave music lessons, chiefly for the sake of occupation, as her mother's legacy supplied all their needs, and even left a surplus for Bertha, while they lived in such close retirement. Aubrey used to meet her sometimes, when these lessons were over, and bring her home. Often they went to see pictures together ; more often they sat in the little birdcage of a *salon*, talking, in low voices, while Mrs. Hermann knitted or slept.

Judith kept no secrets from her friend. He knew, almost from the first, that her thoughts were taking a direction where his own could never follow. Her lack of ideality puzzled him. Every revelation of spiritual truth had to be clothed in concrete form before she felt able to hold it with a firm grasp. Aubrey, by nature a mystic, apprehending parables as easily as if his birthplace had been in the East, observed this limitation with immense surprise. He tried to explain his own point of view, but she could not see what he meant. Then they wisely relinquished argument, and agreed to look at things through different ends of the telescope.

'Whatever you do,' he begged, 'don't try to convert me ; because, if you try and fail, your affection will turn to dislike. I have noticed that is always what happens.'

It was worth while having uttered this caution, if only for the sake of hearing Judith laugh—a ringing, natural laugh—such as he had scarcely hoped ever to hear again.

‘Now, do I look like a missionary?’ she asked. ‘Have I the air of a person who could convince anybody? Even the Imp would mock if I began to teach Dogma. My ideas have a trick of turning topsy-turvy at the wrong moment. You need fear no intemperate zeal from me.’

When the step he dreaded was taken, and she had been received into the Church of Rome, no difference in her manner was apparent, no clouding of confidence; but sometimes a shudder passed over him as he realized the possibility of further changes to come. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hermann had her own anxieties. Victor grew more and more urgent that she should visit the Cape, and was always answered with excuses, because Judith did not wish to go, and to leave her was impossible. ‘Have I no claim?’ wrote Victor, and his mother acknowledged that he had.

‘The first claim of all,’ she said. ‘But, my dear child, you would not know how to live without me. Victor has his wife. Your mother is necessary to you.’

'Not if she pines to go away,' said Judith gently.

'If I could have seen you married,' sighed Mrs. Hermann, 'and felt sure—'

The sentence was never completed, for Judith laid her finger on her lips.

'Is there no destiny but that?' she asked, after a moment's pause. 'You have one daughter who is married. May not the other feel drawn towards a different vocation?'

'You are only twenty-four,' said Mrs. Hermann, nervously.

'Ah, but I have lived a great deal!'

'Tell me quickly, dearest, what does this mean?'

'Aubrey knows already. I could not bear to tell *you*.'

'Is it that you mean to take vows?' cried Mrs. Hermann. 'Oh, I see it all! How blind I was not to guess this before!'

'I am going to be a Sister of Charity,' said Judith; 'it is the only life possible for me.'

While these things were happening in Paris, Fidelia was battling with disappointment at home. She found that schemes, which look infallible on paper, are destroyed by the folly of human beings directly there is any attempt to put them into practice.

When she tried to force her friends to work two hours every day for the good of the community, giving them all the rest of the twenty-four for themselves, they either grumbled at her cruelty or dawdled through their compulsory services, like paupers engaged in sweeping a road. She could not wake up the faintest sparks of ambition in any, unless three enthusiasts might be excepted whose whims and fads made them extremely troublesome inmates.

A small-minded person would have thrown up her efforts in disgust ; but Fidelia was too noble to let personal pique come between her and duty. At times sickening despair threatened to overwhelm her. She longed for the appearance of a prophet who should inspire great enthusiasm, and knit all the people together by a common bond. Now and then she fancied she saw his sign in the sky, but still the months passed, the world's woe augmented, and he never came.

Then her health gave way. It was amazing to her that so many women, more delicate than she, continued in harness year after year—speaking at public meetings, visiting in slums, stealing, perhaps, three weeks' holiday out of the fifty-two, and never succumbed. They understood no other life than the one they lived. She had tasted the magic draught

of love, and it had deepened and softened her whole nature, but doomed her, at the same time, to suffer continual regret. Sometimes she heard herself accused, of being ill for no reason at all, and was assured, by these stronger ones, that a small effort would enable her to work as they did. Poor Fidelia ! Her continued existence was due to effort. She often realised the truth of old Teufelsdrockh's words :

‘ How beautiful to die of broken heart—on paper ! Quite another thing in practice ; every window of your feeling, even of your intellect, as it were, begrimed and mud-bespattered, so that no pure ray can enter ; a whole drug-shop in your inwards ; the forlorn soul drowning slowly in quagmires of disgust ! ’

Fortunately for every one, this miserable state of things came to an end. It is always the unexpected that happens. One of her Socialist friends, a man six years younger than herself, fell in love with her, and, after proposing three times, contrived the fourth time to carry his point. Fidelia married, amid the lamentations and warnings of her family, who have lived to see her one of the happiest women in London. She carries all her views into practice, even allowing her husband to wear sandals out of

doors—a point at which, some people say, she should draw the line. Fidelia was always so thorough in everything she undertook! Their home has become a rendezvous for many odd characters, and some dangerous ones. Mrs. Stafford can never be persuaded to risk her life inside, which is, perhaps, no great loss to the inmates.

Aubrey lives and works. He has painted some beautiful pictures. Twice every year he goes to Paris, where Judith's sphere now lies. Her home is the street; her family, those who are in sickness or distress. He always finds her the same: eagerly interested in everything that concerns him, beautiful as ever, brilliant, entertaining. Only, during the last ten minutes before they separate, a shadow steals over her face. Once she said, ‘If I had done as you wished, Aubrey, we should not be so much to each other as we are now.’

Another day, ‘If you are ill, dearest, you will send for me. Of course, I should be allowed to come.’

Up to this time he has not claimed her promise, though he often thinks the illness would be well worth having which brought her radiant presence into his solitary rooms.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

POPULAR NOVELS.

Each Work complete in One Volume, crown 8vo. price Six Shillings.

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN:

IN KEDAR'S TENTS. 7th Edition.
THE GREY LADY. With 12 full-page Illustrations.
THE SOWERS. 18th Edition.

By A. CONAN DOYLE:

THE TRAGEDY OF THE KOROSKO. With 40 full-page Illustrations.
UNCLE BERNAC. 2nd Edition.
With 12 full-page Illustrations.
RODNEY STONE. With 8 full-page Illustrations.
THE WHITE COMPANY. 18th Edition.

By S. R. CROCKETT:

CLEG KELLY, ARAB OF THE CITY.
33rd Thousand.

By Mrs. HUMPHRY WARD:

HELBECK OF BANNISDALE.
SIR GEORGE TRESSADY. 3rd Edition.
MARCELLA. 16th Edition.
ROBERT ELSMERE. 27th Edition.
THE HISTORY OF DAVID GRIEVE. 9th Edition.

By Mrs. OLIPHANT:

THE WAY OF LIFE. Two Stories.

By Mrs. E. RENTOUL ESLER:

THE WARDLAWS.

By Miss THACKERAY:

OLD KENSINGTON.
THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF.
FIVE OLD FRIENDS AND A YOUNG PRINCE.
TO ESTHER, and other Sketches.
BLUE BEARD'S KEYS, and other Stories.
THE STORY OF ELIZABETH;
TWO HOURS; FROM AN ISLAND.
TOILERS AND SPINSTERS;
and other Essays.
MISS ANGEL: Fulham Lawn.
MISS WILLIAMSON'S DIVAGATIONS.
MRS. DYMOND.

By CLIVE PHILLIPPS-WOLLEY:

ONE OF THE BROKEN BRIGADE.

By ALEXANDER INNES SHAND:
THE LADY GRANGE.

By the Rev. J. E. C. WELLDON:
GERALD EVERSLY'S FRIENDSHIP: a Study in Real Life. 4th Edition.

By ARCHIE ARMSTRONG:

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

By the Rev. COSMO GORDON LANG:

THE YOUNG CLANROY: a Romance of the '45.

By W. CARLTON DAWE:

CAPTAIN CASTLE: a Story of the South Sea. With a Frontispiece.

By Mrs. DE LA PASTURE:

DEBORAH OF TOD'S. 3rd Edition.

By ANNA HOWARTH:

JAN: an Afrikander. 2nd Edition.

By FRANCIS H. HARDY:

THE MILLS OF GOD.

By HAMILTON DRUMMOND:

FOR THE RELIGION.

By ARCHER P. CROUCH:

SEÑORITA MONTENAR.

By J. A. ALTSHELER:

A SOLDIER OF MANHATTAN.

By OLIVE BIRRELL:

THE AMBITION OF JUDITH.

By PERCY FENDALL and FOX RUSSELL:

OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

By A. E. HOUGHTON:

GILBERT MURRAY.

By ADAM LILBURN:

THE BORDERER.

By Mrs. BIRCHENOUGH:

DISTURBING ELEMENTS.

By PERCY ANDREAE:

THE SIGNORA: a Tale.
THE MASK AND THE MAN.

By R. O. PROWSE:

A FATAL RESERVATION.

By LORD MONKSWELL:

KATE GRENVILLE.

By SARAH TYTLER:

KINCAID'S WIDOW.

By LADY VERNEY:

LLANALY REEFS.
LETTICE LISLE. With 3 Illustrations.

SMITH, ELDER, & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

A SIMPLE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH NOW IN USE. By JOHN EARLE, M.A., Rector of Swanswick ; Rawlinsonian Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford ; Author of 'English Prose: its Elements, History, and Usage,' 'The Philology of the English Tongue,' &c. Crown 8vo. 6s.

GARDNER'S HOUSEHOLD MEDICINE AND SICK-ROOM GUIDE: a Description of the means of Preserving Health, and the Treatment of Diseases, Injuries, and Emergencies. Revised and expressly adapted for the Use of Families, Missionaries, and Colonists. By W. H. C. STAVELEY, F.R.C.S. Eng. Thirteenth and Cheaper Edition. With numerous Illustrations. Demy 8vo. 8s. 6d.

MRS. E. B. BROWNING'S LETTERS. Edited, with Biographical Additions, by FREDERIC G. KENYON. THIRD EDITION. 2 vols. With Portraits. Crown 8vo. 15s. net.

'These volumes are the first adequate contribution which has been made to a real knowledge of Mrs. Browning. . . . The inestimable value of the collection is that it contains not merely interesting critical writing, but the intimate expression of a personality.'—ATHENÆUM.

MRS. BROWNING'S COMPLETE WORKS. New and Cheaper Edition, complete in One Volume, with Portrait and Facsimile of a 'Sonnet from the Portuguese.' Large crown 8vo. bound in cloth, with gilt top, 7s. 6d.

*** This Edition is uniform with the Two-volume Edition of Robert Browning's Complete Works.

'The first really complete edition of the poetess' works. . . . In form, as well as in substance, the volume will be a welcome addition to many a library and bookshelf.'—TIMES.

THE WAR OF GREEK INDEPENDENCE, 1821-1833. By W. ALISON PHILLIPS, M.A., late Scholar of Merton College, Senior Scholar of St. John's College, Oxford. With Map. Large crown 8vo. 7s. 6d.

'We sincerely commend Mr. Alison Phillips' "History of the Greek War of Independence" to all readers who have had their attention turned to that country of late. . . . We have met few books better calculated to clear the mind of cant on a subject concerning which much cant has of late been talked.'—ST. JAMES'S GAZETTE.

FRIENDSHIP'S GARLAND. By MATTHEW ARNOLD. Second Edition. Small crown 8vo. bound in white cloth, 4s. 6d.

'All lovers of Matthew Arnold and of genuine humour will hail with delight the republication of "Friendship's Garland." . . . The book is written throughout in the highest possible spirits, and there is not a dull page in it.'—DAILY NEWS.

FRANCE UNDER LOUIS XV. By JAMES BRECK PERKINS, Author of 'France under the Regency.' 2 vols. Crown 8vo. 16s.

'A very good book. . . . Mr. Perkins' tracing out of the foreign policy of France through the wars which did so much to break down her power and the prestige of her crown is very clear and intelligent, and his judgment appears to be generally sound.'—TIMES.

A BROWNING COURTSHIP; and other Stories. By ELIZA ORNE WHITE, Author of 'The Coming of Theodora' &c. Small post 8vo. 5s.

INDIAN FRONTIER POLICY. An Historical Sketch. By General Sir JOHN ADVE, G.C.B., R.A., Author of 'Recollections of a Military Life.' With Map. Demy 8vo. 3s. 6d.

ELECTRIC MOVEMENT IN AIR AND WATER. With Theoretical Inferences. By Lord ARMSTRONG, C.B., F.R.S., LL.D., &c. With Autotype Plates. Imperial 4to. £1. 10s. net.

One of the most remarkable contributions to physical and electrical knowledge that have been made in recent years. . . . The illustrations are produced in a superb manner, entirely worthy of so remarkable a monograph.'—TIMES.

GABRIELE VON BÜLOW, Daughter of Wilhelm von Humboldt. A Memoir compiled from the Family Papers of Wilhelm von Humboldt and his Children, 1791-1887. Translated by CLARA NORDLINGER. With Portraits and a Preface by Sir EDWARD B. MALET, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., &c. Demy 8vo. 16s.

'Miss Nordlinger's excellent translation gives English readers an opportunity of becoming acquainted with a very charming personality, and of following the events of a life which was bound up with many interesting incidents and phases of English history.'—TIMES.

SMITH, ELDER, & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

COLLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS. By 'ONE WHO HAS KEPT A DIARY.' With a Frontispiece. Demy 8vo. 16s.

SONGS OF ACTION. By CONAN DOYLE. Fcp. 8vo. 5s.

MR. GREGORY'S LETTER-BOX, 1813-30. Edited by Lady GREGORY. With a Portrait. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d.

'Lady Gregory's pages bristle with good stories. Indeed, the great difficulty of a reviewer in dealing with this fascinating book is the plethora of good things that clamour for quotation.'—WORLD.

EGYPT IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY; or, Mehemet Ali and his Successors until the British Occupation in 1882. By DONALD A. CAMERON, H.B.M.'s Consul at Port Said. With a Map. Post 8vo. 6s.

'Mr. Cameron knows, and knows thoroughly, not only Egypt itself, but the literature dealing with modern Egypt, and therefore we can most strongly recommend his comprehensive and yet brightly-written little book.'—SPECTATOR.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR YOUNG. With Selections from his Correspondence. Edited by M. BETHAM-EDWARDS. With 2 Portraits and 2 Views. Large crown 8vo. 12s. 6d.

'Miss Edwards has done her task with a reserve and succinctness to be much commended. She deserves well of all who hold in honour the memory of one who ever strove manfully to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before.'—TIMES.

THE LIFE OF SIR JOHN HAWLEY GLOVER, R.N., G.C.M.G.

By Lady GLOVER. Edited by the Right Hon. Sir RICHARD TEMPLE, Bart., G.C.S.I., D.C.L., LL.D., F.R. : With Portrait and Maps. Demy 8vo. 14s.

'Written with noteworthy tact, ability, and discretion by his widow. . . . One of the best and most satisfactory biographies of its class produced within recent years.'—WORLD.

DEEDS THAT WON THE EMPIRE. By the Rev. W. H. FITCHETT (Vedette). Sixth Edition. With 16 Portraits and 11 Plans. Crown 8vo. 6s.

'There is no bluster, no brag, no nauseous cant about a chosen people ; but there is a ringing enthusiasm for endurance, for dashing gallantry, for daring and difficult feats, which generous-hearted boys and men will respond to quickly. There is not a flabby paragraph from beginning to end.'—BOOKMAN.

POT-POURRI FROM A SURREY GARDEN. By Mrs. C. W. EARLE. With an Appendix by Lady CONSTANCE LYTTON. TWELFTH EDITION. Crown 8vo. 7s. 6d.

DEAN HOLE, in an article upon the work in the *NINETEENTH CENTURY* for April, says :—'There is no time for further enjoyment of this sweet, spicy "Pot-pourri" ; no space for further extracts from this clever and comprehensive book ; only for two more earnest words to the reader—*Buy it.*'

LORD COCHRANE'S TRIAL BEFORE LORD ELLENBOROUGH IN 1814. By J. B. ATLAY. With a Preface by EDWARD DOWNES LAW, Commander, Royal Navy. With Portrait. 8vo. 18s.

THE STORY OF THE CHURCH OF EGYPT: being an Outline of the History of the Egyptians under their successive Masters from the Roman Conquest until now. By E. L. BUTCHER, Author of 'A Strange Journey,' 'A Black Jewel,' &c. In 2 vols. Crown 8vo. 16s.

'Mrs. Butcher is to be congratulated on the ability, thoroughness, and research which she has brought to the accomplishment of her formidable task.'—CHRISTIAN WORLD.

RELIGIO MEDICI, and other Essays. By Sir THOMAS BROWNE. Edited, with an Introduction, by D. LLOYD ROBERTS, M.D., F.R.C.P. Revised Edition. Fcp. 8vo. 3s. 6d. net.

'An excellent selection, edited with the loving care of a true bibliophile, which leaves no phase of Browne's genius unrevealed.'—MANCHESTER COURIER.

TWELVE YEARS IN A MONASTERY. By JOSEPH McCABE, late FATHER ANTONY, O.S.F. Large crown 8vo. 7s. 6d.

'No more ruthless exposure of the hollowness of the Roman system, in all its infinite ramifications, has ever, we believe, appeared in this country. Mr. McCabe writes without vindictiveness, but lays bare the sinews and nerves of the inner heart of Roman Catholicism.'—ROCK.

SMITH, ELDER, & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

A YEAR IN THE FIELDS. Selections from the Writings of JOHN BURROUGHS. With Illustrations from photographs by Clifton Johnson. Cr. 8vo. 6s.
'The book is an excellent example of its kind, pleasant, chatty, and readable. . . Fresh and graphic, instinct with country sights, scents, and sounds.'—LAND AND WATER.
'The book is pleasant reading, and Mr. Burroughs is a true lover of Nature.'

ATHENÆUM.

THE MONEY-SPINNER, and other Character Notes. By H. SETON MERRIMAN, Author of 'The Sowers,' 'With Edged Tools,' &c., and S. G. TALLENTYRE. With 12 Full-page Illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Second Edition. Crown 8vo. 6s.

'We have many bad books, and many goody-goody books, but few good books ; this is one of them.'—Mr. JAMES PAYN, in the *Illustrated London News*.

SELECTED POEMS OF WALTER VON DER VOGELWEIDE THE MINNESINGER. Done into English Verse by W. ALISON PHILLIPS, M.A., late Scholar of Merton College, and Senior Scholar of St. John's College, Oxford. With 6 Full-page Illustrations. Small 4to. 10s. 6d. net.

A HISTORY OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE FROM THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM TO THE FALL OF JERUSALEM IN 566 B.C. By CHARLES FOSTER KENT, Ph.D., Associate-Professor of Biblical Literature and History, Brown University. With Maps and Chart. Crown 8vo. 6s.

* * * This Second Volume completes the Work.

ENGLISH PROSE: its Elements, History, and Usage. By JOHN EARLE, M.A., Rector of Swanswick, formerly Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College, Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford. 8vo. 16s.

THE HISTORIC NOTE-BOOK; with an Appendix of Battles. By the Rev. E. COBHAM BREWER, LL.D., Author of 'The Dictionary of Phrase and Fable,' 'The Reader's Handbook,' &c. Crown 8vo. over 1,000 pp., 7s. 6d.

GEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE VOLCANIC ISLANDS AND PARTS OF SOUTH AMERICA, visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. 'Beagle.' By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A., F.R.S. Third Edition. With Maps and Illustrations. Crown 8vo. 12s. 6d.

THE STRUCTURE AND DISTRIBUTION OF CORAL REEFS. By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A., F.R.S., F.G.S. With an Introduction by Professor T. G. BONNEY, D.Sc., F.R.S., F.G.S. Third Edition. Crown 8vo. 8s. 6d.

HAYTI; or, the Black Republic. By Sir SPENSER ST. JOHN, G.C.M.G., formerly Her Majesty's Minister Resident and Consul-General in Hayti, now Her Majesty's Special Envoy to Mexico. Second Edition, revised. With a Map. Large crown 8vo. 8s. 6d.

THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA: a Survey of Fifty Years of Progress. Edited by T. HUMPHRY WARD. 2 vols. 8vo. 32s.

A COLLECTION OF LETTERS OF W. M. THACKERAY, 1847-1855. With Portraits and Reproductions of Letters and Drawings. Second Edition. Imperial 8vo. 12s. 6d.

A JOURNAL KEPT BY DICK DOYLE IN THE YEAR 1840. Illustrated by several hundred Sketches by the Author. With an Introduction by J. HUNTERFORD POLLEN, and a Portrait. Second Edition. Demy 4to. 21s.

THE INGENIOUS GENTLEMAN, DON QUIXOTE OF LA MANCHA. By MIGUEL DE CERVANTES SAAVEDRA. A Translation, with Introduction and Notes, by JOHN ORMSBY, Translator of 'The Poem of the Cid.' Complete in 4 vols. 8vo. £2. 10s.

SHAKSPEARE COMMENTARIES. By Dr. G. G. GERVINUS, Professor at Heidelberg. Translated, under the Author's superintendence, by F. E. BUNNETT. With a Preface by F. J. FURNIVALL. Fifth Edition. 8vo. 14s.

THE STORY OF GOETHE'S LIFE. By GEORGE HENRY LEWES. Second Edition. Crown 8vo. 7s. 6d.

SMITH, ELDER, & CO.'S PUBLICATIONS.

NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION OF 'THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY.'

In 7 volumes, large crown 8vo. with 2 Portraits.

- | | |
|--|---|
| THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY. | By JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS. |
| 1. THE AGE OF THE DESPOTS. With | 4 & 5. ITALIAN LITERATURE. |
| a Portrait. Price 7s. 6d. | 2 Vols. Price 15s. |
| 2. THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING. | 6 & 7. THE CATHOLIC REACTION. |
| Price 7s. 6d. | With a Portrait and an Index to
the 7 Vols. Price 15s. |
| 3. THE FINE ARTS. Price 7s. 6d. | |

ISABELLA THE CATHOLIC, QUEEN OF SPAIN: Her Life, Reign, and Times, 1451-1504. By M. LE BARON DE NERVO. Translated from the Original French by Lieut.-Colonel TEMPLE-WEST (Retired). With Portraits. Demy 8vo. 12s. 6d.

'Neither too long nor too short, not overladen with detail nor impoverished from lack of matter, and is at the same time ample and orderly enough to satisfy the ordinary student.'—DAILY TELEGRAPH.

THE ANNALS OF RURAL BENGAL. From Official Records and the Archives of Native Families. By Sir W. W. HUNTER, K.S.C.I., C.I.E., LL.D., &c. New, Revised, and Cheaper Edition (the Seventh). Crown 8vo. 7s. 6d.
'One of the most important as well as most interesting works which the records of Indian literature can show.'—WESTMINSTER REVIEW.

FROM GRAVE TO GAY: being Essays and Studies concerned with Certain Subjects of Serious Interest, with the Puritans, with Literature, and with the Humours of Life, now for the first time Collected and Arranged. By J. ST. LOE STRACHEY. Crown 8vo. 6s.
'Undeniably clever, well-informed, brightly written, and in many ways interesting.'—TIMES.

COLLECTED CONTRIBUTIONS ON DIGESTION AND DIET. With an Appendix on the Opium Habit in India. By Sir WILLIAM ROBERTS, M.D., F.R.S. Second Edition. Crown 8vo. 5s.

THROUGH LONDON SPECTACLES. By CONSTANCE MILMAN. Crown 8vo. 3s. 6d.
'Altogether a very pleasant and companionable little book.'—SPECTATOR.

SIR CHARLES HALLÉ'S LIFE AND LETTERS. Being an Auto-biography (1819-60), with Correspondence and Diaries. Edited by his Son, C. E. HALLÉ, and his Daughter, MARIE HALLÉ. With 2 Portraits. Demy 8vo. 16s.

'The volume is one of the most interesting of recent contributions to the literature of music. . . . A strong sense of humour is manifest in the autobiography as well as in the letters, and there are some capital stories scattered up and down the volumes.'—TIMES.

THE MEMOIRS OF BARON THIÉBAULT (late Lieutenant-General in the French Army). With Recollections of the Republic, the Consulate, and the Empire. Translated and Condensed by A. J. BUTLER, M.A., Translator of the 'Memoirs of Marbot.' 2 vols. With 2 Portraits and 2 Maps. Demy 8vo. 28s.

'Mr. Butler's work has been admirably done. . . . These memoirs abound in varied interest, and, moreover, they have no little literary merit. . . . For solid history, bright sketches of rough campaigning, shrewd studies of character, and lively anecdote, these memoirs yield in no degree to others.'—TIMES.

PREHISTORIC MAN AND BEAST. By the Rev. H. N. HUTCHINSON, Author of 'Extinct Monsters,' 'Creatures of Other Days,' &c. With a Preface by Sir HENRY HOWARTH, M.P., F.R.S., and 10 full-page Illustrations. Small demy 8vo. 10s. 6d.

'A striking picture of living men and conditions as they once existed. . . . It combines graphic description with scientific accuracy, and is an admirable example of what a judicious use of the imagination can achieve upon a basis of established fact.'

KNOWLEDGE.

ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS AND 'LIFE AND LETTERS.'

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING.

Edited and Annotated by AUGUSTINE BIRRELL, Q.C., M.P., and FREDERIC G. KENYON. In 2 vols. large crown 8vo. bound in cloth, gilt top, with a Portrait-Frontispiece to each volume, 7s. 6d. per volume.

* * * An Edition has also been printed on Oxford India Paper. This can be obtained only through booksellers, who will furnish particulars as to price, &c.

UNIFORM EDITION OF THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING.

Seventeen Volumes, small crown 8vo., lettered separately, or in set binding, price 5s. each.

This Edition contains Three Portraits of Mr. Browning, at different periods of life, and a few Illustrations.

CONTENTS OF THE VOLUMES.

1. PAULINE : and SORDELLO.
2. PARACELsus : & STRAFFORD.
3. PIPPA PASSES : KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES : THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES : and A SOUL'S TRAGEDY. With a Portrait of Mr. Browning.
4. A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON' : COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY : and MEN AND WOMEN.
5. DRAMATIC ROMANCES : and CHRISTMAS EVE & EASTER DAY.
6. DRAMATIC LYRICS : and LURIA.
7. IN A BALCONY : and DRAMATIS PERSONÆ. With a Portrait of Mr. Browning.
8. THE RING AND THE BOOK. Books 1 to 4. With Two Illustrations.
9. THE RING AND THE BOOK Books 5 to 8.
10. THE RING AND THE BOOK. Books 9 to 12. With a Portrait of Guido Franceschini.
11. BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE : PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU, Saviour of Society : and FIFINE AT THE FAIR.
12. RED COTTON NIGHTCAP COUNTRY : and THE INN ALBUM.
13. ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY, including a Transcript from Euripides, being the Last Adventure of Balaustion : and THE AGAMEMNON OF AESCHYLUS.
14. PACCHIAROTTO, and How he Worked in Distemper ; with other Poems : LA SAISIAZ : and THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.
15. DRAMATIC IDYLS. First Series : DRAMATIC IDYLS, Second Series : and JOCOSERIA.
16. FERISHTAH'S FANCIES : and PARLEYINGS WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE IN THEIR DAY. With a Portrait of Mr. Browning.
17. ASOLANDO : Fancies and Facts ; and BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL NOTES TO THE POEMS.

A SELECTION FROM THE POETICAL WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING. FIRST SERIES. Crown 8vo. 3s. 6d. SECOND SERIES. Crown 8vo. 3s. 6d.

POCKET VOLUME OF SELECTIONS FROM THE POETICAL WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING. Small fcp. 8vo. bound in half-cloth, with cut or uncut edges, price ONE SHILLING.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF ROBERT BROWNING.

By MRS. SUTHERLAND ORR. With Portrait, and Steel Engraving of Mr. Browning's Study in De Vere Gardens. Second Edition. Crown 8vo. 12s. 6d.

London : SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

WORKS BY JAMES PAYN.

'A little masterpiece.'—NATIONAL OBSERVER.

Crown 8vo. limp red cloth, 2s. 6d.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GEORGE DRIFFELL.

THE SPEAKER.—‘Mr. Payn has never written a more excellent story.’

THE ATHENÆUM.—‘Uncommonly well told. . . . The book is full of those good spirits and those dashes of fun which have lighted up all his writings.’

THE DAILY NEWS.—‘The story evolves through a sequence of ingeniously devised and vividly presented scenes, and the dialogue has unfailing point and wit. The interest holds us to the end.’

THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.—‘A capital story, told in the artistic photographic style in which Mr. Payn is a master.’

'Replete with good stories.'—THE TIMES.

SECOND EDITION. Crown 8vo. 3s. 6d.

GLEAMS OF MEMORY; WITH SOME REFLECTIONS.

THE WORLD.—‘Of all the personal books that have appeared of late years, Mr. James Payn’s “Gleams of Memory” is the most attractive. . . . It is not a book to be analysed or criticised; it is to be read, liked, and simply believed.’

PUNCH.—‘Within its modest limits of space will be found not only some of the best stories of the day, but stories the best told. Not a superfluous word spoils the gems.’

THE SATURDAY REVIEW.—‘Mr. Payn’s “Gleams” are gleams of sunlight; memories of old laughter echo through his unaffected pages.’

'One of the pleasantest books that has appeared for some time.'

PALL MALL GAZETTE.

Fcp. 8vo. limp cloth, 2s. 6d.

SOME LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS.

THE ATHENÆUM.—‘To say that Mr. Payn is seen at his best in the book is as much as to say that it is remarkably pleasant reading. The stories it contains are not all new. . . . But, old and new, the stories are all well told. . . . And then the spirit of the book is eminently generous and gay. . . . In brief, his book is one of those which, like that of Maxime du Camp, if for somewhat different reasons, leave a good taste in the mouth. . . . For that reason, if for no other, it should have readers in abundance.’

THE SATURDAY REVIEW.—‘In a season of biographies and reminiscences Mr. Payn’s “Recollections” have several peculiarities of their own. First, they are short—we wish they were longer. . . . Again, Mr. Payn’s Memories are all good-natured. . . . Thirdly, Mr. Payn’s Memories have nothing to do with politics. . . . Mr. Payn’s “Recollections” are quite full of anecdotes of authors, editors, publishers, yea, even of publishers’ readers, and are everywhere buoyant and attractive with humour and good humour.’

Fcp. 8vo. boards, Pictorial cover, 2s. ; or limp cloth, 2s. 6d.

THE HEIR OF THE AGES.

THE SPECTATOR.—“The Heir of the Ages” is as pleasant and attractive a story as one can expect to come across.’

THE ATHENÆUM.—‘Mr. Payn has always taken a cheerful view of life, but in “The Heir of the Ages” he surpasses himself. . . . Through it all Mr. Payn is at his best.’

THE SCOTSMAN.—‘An excellent tale, with some touches in it, as we think, higher than any Mr. Payn has yet attempted.’

THE ACADEMY.—‘As bright, as clever, and as interesting as any of its predecessors. In one respect—namely, as regards clear, sympathetic, and graphic delineation of character—it is almost superior to any others by the same writer.’

NEW EDITION OF W. M. THACKERAY'S WORKS.

TO BE ISSUED IN THIRTEEN MONTHLY VOLUMES.

Large Crown 8vo. cloth, gilt top, 6s. each.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION

OF

W. M. THACKERAY'S COMPLETE WORKS.

THIS NEW AND REVISED EDITION

COMPRISSES

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL and HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS, SKETCHES, and DRAWINGS

Derived from the Author's Original Manuscripts and Note-Books, AND EACH VOLUME WILL INCLUDE A MEMOIR, IN THE FORM OF AN INTRODUCTION,

BY MRS. RICHMOND RITCHIE.

The following will be the order of the volumes:—

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------|
| 1. VANITY FAIR. | With 20 Full-page Illustrations, 11 Woodcuts, a Facsimile Letter, and a new Portrait. | [Ready.] |
| 2. PENDENNIS. | With 20 Full-page Illustrations and 10 Woodcuts. | [Ready.] |
| 3. YELLOWPLUSH PAPERS, &c. | With 24 Full-page Reproductions of Steel Plates by GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, 11 Woodcuts, and a Portrait of the Author by MACLISE. | [On June 15.] |
| 4. THE MEMOIRS OF BARRY LYNDON: The FITZBOODLE PAPERS, &c. | With 16 Full-page Illustrations by Sir J. E. MILLAIS, P.R.A., LUKE FIDDES, A.R.A., and the AUTHOR, and 14 Woodcuts. | |
| 5. SKETCH BOOKS, &c. | 9. CHRISTMAS BOOKS, &c. | |
| 6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO 'PUNCH.' | 10. VIRGINIANS. | |
| 7. ESMOND, &c. | 11. PHILIP, &c. | |
| 8. NEWCOMES. | 12. DENIS DUVAL, &c. | |
| | 13. MISCELLANIES, &c. | |

From the **DAILY CHRONICLE**.—‘We shall have, when the thirteen volumes of this edition are issued, not indeed a biography of Thackeray, but something which will delightfully supply the place of a biography, and fill a regrettable gap in our literary records.’

From the **ACADEMY**.—‘Thackeray wished that no biography of him should appear. It is certain that the world has never ceased to desire one, hence the compromise effected in this edition of his works. Mrs. Ritchie, his daughter, will contribute to each volume in this edition her memories of the circumstances under which her father produced it. Such memoirs, when complete, cannot fall far short of being an actual biography.’

From the **GUARDIAN**.—‘Messrs. Smith, Elder, & Co. have done well to give a thoroughly “holdable” as well as readable form to the BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION OF THACKERAY. The new “Vanity Fair” is handsome enough for dignity, and yet light enough to be read with comfort.’

* * * *A Prospectus of the Edition, with Specimen Pages, will be sent post free on application.*

London: SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

RARE BOOK
COLLECTION



THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

Smith Elder
877

